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One Big Union in transportation?

BY BALTIMORE RED

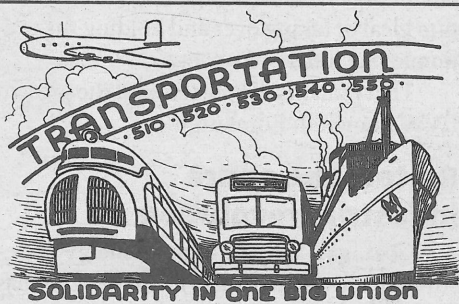
The last 25 years or so have seen dramatic changes in the transportation industry, many brought on by deregulation. "Rationalization" of the nation's railroads has cost hundreds of thousands of good union jobs. Meanwhile the myriad craft unions that the workforce has been historically divided into have all seen their numbers shrink, in some cases dramatically. It has become increasingly burdensome for each of these unions to support separate union structures and bureaucracies. Like many unions in basic industry, rail unions are driven to seek merger partners in face of dwindling memberships.

But in the case of the recent Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers - International Brotherhood of Teamsters merger, there is a little more to it than this. Having rebuffed not one, but two previous merger attempts proposed by the United Transportation Union, the BLE found itself on the defensive. After its overtures failed, the trainmen's union launched an all-out assault on the engineers union. First, the UTU cut a backroom deal with rail carriers to implement remote control locomotives (RCO) across the country in major yards, eliminating thousands of engineer positions. Then the UTU announced its intention to seek a series of winner-take-all elections on the nation's freight railroads, contests that the much larger UTU felt it could win. In effect, this action amounted to a raid of the BLE. Having been sanctioned by the AFL-CIO, the UTU unceremoniously pulled out of the federation (and so is free to continue its raiding). With its back against the wall, the relatively small BLE sought refuge in a merger with the IBT.

But ironically, many aspects of the proposed UTU-BLE merger which were so unpalatable to the engineers appear nearly identical to the consummated IBT-BLE union. When the UTU unsuccessfully courted the BLE just a few short years ago, enginemen rejected the proposal, citing reasons such as: That the smaller BLE would play second fiddle to the larger UTU; That the craft of engineer would better be served by an exclusive union of enginemen, not one combined with trainmen and others; That a merger would pave the way to the destruction of engineer as a distinct craft; and that such a merger would result in a top-heavy bureaucracy of the combined leadership of both unions. Whatever the merits of these fears, the actual IBT merger does indeed embody all of this. The BLE is in fact, the junior partner in the merger to the much larger Teamsters; the BLE, as part of the merger is now the BLE&T (the T stands for trainmen), no longer strictly an enginemen's craft union; and the bureaucracy of both unions has been preserved.

Whatever the case, the marriage has been consummated. So what is the potential of this new organization? Proponents of the IBT-BLE marriage point out a number of advantages to the new formation. The BLE&T will now have access to the vast resources of the much larger Teamsters union, including lawyers, research, finances for organizing, lobbying, etc. Then of course, there is the "strength in numbers" argument, simply put, that bigger is better. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, advo-

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185 million jobless

The International Labour Organization reports that global unemployment hit a record 185 million last year, or 6.2 percent of the world's work force. This figure includes only workers in the formal economy who are actively seeking work. Unemployment is highest among younger workers, the ILO reports.

The numbers of people without fixed jobs also continues to grow, while the numbers of "working poor" – defined as living on \$1 a day or less – held steady at 550 million.

Meanwhile, U.S. hourly wages fell for both low- and middle-wage earners last year, dropping by 0.7 percent (after inflation) for workers in the lowest-paid 10 percent.

While employment levels have begun to creep upwards, there are still 2.4 million fewer U.S. jobs than when the recession began – and hundreds of thousands more potential workers. As a result, the share of the unemployed who have been seeking work for at least six months (and thus have exhausted their jobless benefits) continues to rise, and is now at 22.7 percent. Even workers with college degrees are having a difficult time finding jobs, with long-term unemployment up 299 percent over the last three years, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

High tech, low wages

Appalling poverty remains the norm around the world even in high-tech production. A new report by the British-based Catholic relief organization CAFOD reports that

many electronics workers put in 11 or more hours a day in highly toxic environments.

Computer makers have been particularly ruthless in demanding lower-cost production from a network of subcontractors around the world in order to drive down retail prices. Computer prices have been falling for years, by more than 20 percent a year. While new technology has played the key role, computer makers have also increasingly outsourced production to parts makers and assembly lines around the world in search of lower labor costs. While the leading firms have codes of conduct requiring suppliers to respect workers' rights, most rely on local (rather than global) labor standards, and none require suppliers to provide regular employment or respect workers' right to organize.

In Mexico, for example, computer workers can earn as little as \$50 a week – far less than the cost of living. Many employment agencies have a policy of refusing jobs to union members, gays and lesbians, political activists, pregnancy or to those over 30.

China is the world's leading electronics manufacturing nation, in large part because its workers can be had for less than \$2 a day and are often required to work with toxic chemicals and other substances without adequate training or protective gear. These problems are closely linked to workers' inability to organize democratic unions or to participate in factory decision-making in any way, CAFOD notes.

California supermarket fight enters 5th month

As the Southern California grocery lock-out and strike entered its fifth month, the UFCW proposed an immediate return to work with all outstanding issues submitted to binding arbitration. Asked if the union's willingness to submit to binding arbitration meant that the strike had failed, Local 770 President Ralph Icaza said, "Absolutely not."

The supermarket chains promptly rejected the offer. However, the companies did offer to return to the bargaining table to see what additional concessions the union was willing to offer.

The two sides met with a federal mediator Feb. 11, and sporadic talks have continued ever since with both sides keeping quiet about their progress.

Meanwhile, as picket lines gradually weaken and customers trickle back into stores, the AFL-CIO is organizing demonstrations across the country in an effort to build pressure on the supermarket chains to settle.

Demonstrations have targeted Safeway stores across the country, and 250 strikers marched on the gated Northern California home of Safeway CEO Steve Burd in January, challenging the "charitable" boss (who gave \$80,000 to save the lives of puppies in animal shelters last year) to do the right thing.

Nearly 14,000 supporters turned out Feb. 1 for a rally at an Inglewood, Calif., store where AFL Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson called the supermarket workers "the heroes of the American labor movement."

In Baltimore, the local AFL council president was arrested Feb. 13 during a solidarity action in which he attempted to pay for candy at a Safeway store with pennies while representatives of 20 local unions picketed outside. The UFCW's contract with Maryland Safeway stores expires March 31, but that union did not join the protest.

Similar demonstrations have taken place across the country, most notably in Northern California, where contracts with American

(owner of Albertson's), Kroger (Ralphs) and Safeway (Vons and Pavillions)-owned stores are set to expire. At a Jan. 24 action, several activists rushed into a San Francisco Safeway, marching through the aisles before they were ejected by police.

UFCW leaders acknowledge that they never expected the dispute to last this long, and are now dependent on aid from other unions to keep the strikers afloat. The locals have cut strike benefits and vacillated between expanding picketing in an attempt to shut down the scab stores and appealing management by pulling pickets altogether. The UFCW also failed to design a national strategy, even though it has long been clear that the chains were capable of exploiting their earnings in the rest of the country to cover losses in California.

On Wall Street, investors ignored hundreds of protestors who turned out to support the supermarket workers. The grocery chains have lost more than \$1 billion in combined sales from the strike. Safeway reported a \$696 million loss in the fourth quarter of 2003, \$102.9 million of which it attributed to the strike. Safeway noted its losses were held down by its revenue-sharing pact with Krogers and Albertsons. Stock markets responded favorably to the losses, and Safeway's stock price rebounded to pre-strike levels.


Safeway also handed out nearly \$10 million in stock options to 11 senior executives in December, in the middle of the strike, claiming it was necessary to keep them from quitting. While most stock analysts are supporting management, a few have begun to suggest that it is time for Safeway to respond to the UFCW's repeated offers to accept significant concessions as part of a new contract.

Kroger officials say the dispute has cost the chain \$145 million in sales, while dragging earnings down by about \$90 million. Kroger is one of the U.S.'s largest grocery

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An Edinburgh son & the IWW

Editor, *Industrial Worker*

You may be interested in this short piece about James Connolly's IWW membership and views on industrial unionism. Perhaps it's too late for St Patrick's Day, but the anniversary of his execution (May 12) may be an apt occasion.

There is dissent within the Edinburgh Branch concerning his views on government quoted from *Socialism Made Easy*. Certain members see this as propagating a political creed (i.e. socialism) contrary to the spirit of the IWW non-allegiance to political parties or anti-political sects rule. So be warned.

Alan Johnstone, Edinburgh GMB

Born and bred in Edinburgh, James Connolly is known for his tragic martyrdom in the cause of Irish nationalism as a leader of the ill-fated Easter Rising of 1916. However, what is often overlooked, either through ignorance or cynical political bias, is Connolly's active membership in the Industrial Workers of the World and his stalwart advocacy of industrial unionism.

When the IWW was first formed at Chicago in 1905, James Connolly was working in New Jersey. He quickly helped to set up a local branch of the IWW and wrote to an old friend and comrade back in Edinburgh explaining his thoughts:

"All actions of our class at the ballot box are in the nature of more preliminary skirmishes and... the conquest of political power by the working class waits upon the conquest of economic power and must function through the economic organisation."

By 1907, Connolly was a paid IWW organiser (at the irregularly paid weekly wage of \$18). He was listed as secretary of the Building and Construction Workers Industrial Union and was also the New York correspondent of the *Industrial Union Bulletin*. Connolly was particularly involved in attempts to organise the trolley-car workers, garment workers, milkmen and dock workers. Connolly attended the 1908 IWW 4th Convention, his first and only, and also

throughout that year was founding IWW propaganda leagues.

In an article that year in *The Harp* Connolly expressed his support for: "the new economic organisation, the Industrial Workers of the World, which prepares and organizes the administrative framework of society in the future, and at the same

time furnishes the only effective method of resistance against present-day encroachments of the master class. ... All working-class socialists must realize that their place is in the only economic organization truly worthy of the name of union, the IWW."

In 1910 James Connolly returned to Ireland where he continued to promote the ideas and methods of the IWW within Jim Larkin's newly created Irish Transport and General Workers Union. It wasn't long before the ITGWU became engaged in a vicious lock-out of the Dublin dock-workers by employers which gave rise to the Irish Citizens Army. In 1914 Connolly had this to say in the paper *Forward*:

"The first duty of a militant worker today is to work for industrial unionism... This is to my mind the lesson of Dublin. Industrial Unionism, the amalgamation of all the forces of labour into one union, capable of concentrating all forces upon any one issue or in any one fight, can alone fight industrially as the present development of capital requires that labour should fight."

It was from direct struggle with the employing class that Connolly could endorse the IWW's strategies of conducting the class war which are well worth heeding today in light of those so-called revolutionary vanguardists who would have us out in the streets for the unachievable and the undeliverable:

"Industrialism is more than a method of organisation. It is a science of fighting. It says to the workers: Fight only at the time you select, never when the boss wants to fight. Fight at the height of the busy season, and in the slack season when the worker is one of thousands on the sidewalk absolutely refuse to be drawn into battle. Even if the boss insults you and vilifies your union and refuses

to recognise it, take it lying down in the slack season but mark it up in your little notebook...."

Connolly's advice was that workers should not get involved in strikes that are "simply a trial of strength between a full purse and an empty stomach."

Each year on the streets of Edinburgh there is a march purporting to be in memory of James Connolly and much is said of his Irish nationalism, but let's be reminded of what he writes in his pamphlet *Socialism Made Easy*:

"Under Socialism, states, territories or provinces will exist only as geographical expressions and have no existence as sources of governmental power, though they may be seats of administrative bodies ... The administrative force of the Socialist Republic of the future will function through unions industrially organized, that the principle of democratic control will operate through the workers correctly organised in such industrial unions, and that the political, territorial state of capitalist society will have no place or function under Socialism..."

In "Old Wine in New Bottles" James Connolly describes the IWW as "the first labour organisation to organise with the definite ideal of taking over and holding the economic machinery of society."

That remains the objective of the present IWW Branch in Edinburgh.

Re-tool the entire industrial revolution

Coal, gas, oil and atomic energy is destroying the entire planet's livability. That has been proven scientifically and it is just a matter of time using the present power sources until ecological balances will crash, making life impossible. The final stages of capitalism have indeed proven to be moribund as the early fellow workers pointed out at the birth of the capitalist system.

The last forty years of ecological revolution has brought into being the hi-tech tools necessary to put in place wind, tidal and solar power freely given in nature's kinder laws. It is not a lie in the green revolution that the fellow workers will not be able to live by continuing the bosses' poisoning of the earth, land and water for money.

This news is really not new to the industrial workers. We have known since the inception of the industrial revolution that the bosses did not care for us, but only how much money they could make from our labor power. What is new is the acuteness of the crisis and which is making it impossible for life itself to carry on.

Marty, X33950

Farewell, Fellow Worker James Holly

James Holly, a 10-year employee at the IWW-represented Buy Back recycling yard in Berkeley, Calif., took his own life Jan. 21 to end his suffering from a rapidly deteriorating health condition. Jimmy's life was that of a worker, spending long hours on the line sorting cans, bottles and paper. He paid his union dues every month and kept his red card in his pocket where it belongs. We're going to miss him. Local Wobs made a memorial poster for the union board at the Buy Back.

— Steve Ongerth

Wob jailed on anti-Nazi demo

IWW member Tim Fasnacht began serving a 90-day jail sentence for disorderly conduct on Feb. 9. The charges stem from a rally in York, Pennsylvania, two years ago where protestors clashed with Nazis marching in the town. FW Fasnacht was the only protestor to receive jail time, following a grossly unfair trial where the judge refused a continuance until his attorney could attend.

His appeal of that conviction was rejected by a Superior Court panel last November, but he was not informed of that decision until after the deadline for further appeals had passed. Disorderly conduct charges typically result only in fines; indeed a former Congressman (and prosecutor in the Leonard Peltier case) was recently sentenced to just 100 days after being convicted of manslaughter.

Edmonton: A-Channel settles

Edmonton's A-Channel television has settled a six-month-long strike, under which 76 strikers will return to work March 1. Workers struck Sept. 17, demanding the company replace its favoritism-ridden "merit pay" scheme with a more equitable system.

Industrial Worker

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IWW flying squad protests job losses

BY SKIP PORTER, MILWAUKEE

Milwaukee Wobs observed the Feb. 12 birth anniversaries of Charles Darwin, Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln by picketing Tower Automotive's Milwaukee plant. The 100% IWW line was swiftly organized in reaction to news that 500 more unionized factory jobs around Milwaukee are slated to leave for Mexico. An incensed Milwaukee fellow worker who couldn't stand by and watch this kind of assault on workers organized the picket. Someone had to at least complain publicly and demand some accountability. An hour or two on the phone contacting Milwaukee Wobs and the line went up the next morning.

The jobs building frames for Daimler-Chrysler's best-selling Dodge Ram pickup trucks are not leaving Tower Automotive, however. The new builder, Monterey, Mexico-based Metalsa, is 40% owned by Tower. Tower, of Novi, Michigan, is a successor to hometown Milwaukee industrial powerhouse

Mother Kali's Books locks out Wobblies

BY MADRONE

Workers at Mother Kali's Books in Eugene, Oregon (one of the oldest feminist bookstores in the U.S.), were locked out Jan. 29th, following an unfair labor practices filing with the National Labor Relations Board. Mother Kali's workers are members of IWW Industrial Union 660, and have been seeking negotiations with the Mother Kali's board of directors for several months with no response.

Like most independent (let alone feminist) bookstores, Mother Kali's has its share of financial struggles in a world of Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble. That, however, is just the beginning of the troubles at Mother Kali's. On Jan. 23 the four workers received notices from the board of directors that their jobs would be terminated in mid-February. A rally was held Jan. 27 during a board meeting at which the staff announced that they had filed an unfair labor practices charge.

The board, who had already hired a new manager, met with workers Jan. 29, requesting their keys and saying they would receive pay until the time of the terminations.

The store was closed for a week for "rejuvenation," according to a sign on the door, reopened Feb. 7 for a short time, and then resumed regular hours on Feb. 9. Wobblies are picketing the store, and will continue as long as it remains open with scabs.

Free Speech TV network staff organize with IWW

More than two-thirds of workers at the Free Speech TV network in Boulder, Colorado, have joined the IWW and requested union recognition Feb. 6. FSTV programming is carried over the Dish satellite network and on many cable systems.

"We are proud to be a part of a union with such a long commitment to free speech, and to defending the rights of all workers," said Alex Fountain, Free Speech TV's technical director. Workers await management's decision on union recognition.

IWW, EFN reach first contract

BY PATRICK R. WADE

The Eugene Free Community Network (www.efn.org) has reached its first collective bargaining agreement with workers, who are members of Industrial Union 560 of the Industrial Workers of the World.

The contract was signed Jan. 13 and runs until the end of December 2004. It provides for collaborative decision-making in the workplace, job security, dispute resolution and a commitment to move toward paying a living wage for every employee.

EFN is a nonprofit Internet service provider offering DSL and other Internet services in the Eugene-Springfield area and local dial-up service throughout the Willamette Valley.

A O Smith. This plant covers about 140 acres, and was part of the industrial infrastructure that won WWII. Generally under-used, if at all, grimy carcasses of such factories are features of most Rust Belt urban landscapes.

Out on the picket line, Wobs stuck hand-lettered signs in Tower's steel picket fence that expressed their opinion of the jobs move. 'Jerks!', 'Bastards!', 'Bad Move!', 'Tower Lies!' were just some of the sentiments. From the street, drivers who read the signs gave a steady stream of thumbs up and beeps. Throughout the picketing public response was completely positive. Workers leaving the plant for lunch were receptive and supportive. They knew little of the IWW, but their eyes lit up when they were told the OBU thinks workers can run the plant better than the bosses. Of the union in the factory nothing was seen.

Gate one at Tower proved to be a fine spot for picketing. It was at a crosswalk fitted with a stoplight triggered by any pedestrian wishing to cross. Just push the button, and traffic on the street stops for enough time to get people to roll down their window and find out what is going on. Eventually two news crews arrived and got their sound bites.

The 500 jobs are part of roughly 80,000 manufacturing jobs that have left Wisconsin in the past four years. Wisconsin is not widely considered a factory state, known more for family farms and dairy cows. Manufacturing is a major part of the state economy though, and until recently was one of the state's top three sectors. A drive around the state plainly shows many rural towns have one or two factories that make some product or another that is sent out of the area. Work in these local shops contributes to maintaining family farms. And along with the statewide loss of factory jobs goes the decline of the farm. From 64,000 family farms in 1970, the state has fewer than 20,000 today.

In Milwaukee, when the jobs are gone 18 months from now, about 90 people will still have jobs building frames for Ford Rang-

ers. They will earn about \$18 an hour, the same as they have for years. With the contract ratified in October 2003, unions gave up any raises, cost of living adjustments and incentive pay until 2009. The plant is heavily unionized. In fact there are seven separate unions in the plant sorted by craft, as is the habit of business unions.

A block and a half away from the picket line a Tower union hall kept officials warm and out of the chilly breeze. A picketer (FW) who visited the hall had a conversation pretty much as follows with a union pie-card (PC): FW: Why aren't any of your guys out on a picket line? PC: (no response) FW: Ya gotta get the word out about this (assault on workers). PC: We're getting the word out; I've given four or five TV news interviews. FW: It's past the time to be nice. Ya gotta get out there and let them know you don't like it. PC: Well, we're not being nice; believe me. FW: You should be out there on a line. This is part of globalization and all that crap. PC: Well, (sputters) there are legal ramifications about that. FW: Can I use your bathroom?

The changes to the Milwaukee frame assembly plant were announced Feb. 11. The next day the *Detroit Free Press* reported a 7.2% surge in Tower's stock price. Tower has been crying poor, saying they lost \$24.7 million in 2003. This loss is associated with a joint venture scheme with a Japanese parts maker, not from going broke. In fact Tower itself reports about \$2.75 billion in revenues for 2002. Over the past 10 years, revenue has grown at a compounded annual rate of 61%. For 2004,



PHOTO BY FRANCES BARTELT

Thompson First Call, a market forecasting service, projects first quarter profits of about 8 cents per share, which sells for about \$6.50.

The way this production was moved out illustrates in a nutshell how the global capitalist market works. Just as Wal-Mart suppliers get squeezed for a 5% reduction in costs every year, Tower has the same Faustian bargain with Daimler-Chrysler. The price Tower gets is dictated by decisions at Daimler-Chrysler and if Tower doesn't meet the price, they lose the work. Fortunately, Metalsa is waiting in the wings and Tower lowers costs by paying lower wages. The next step will be for what has happened in Milwaukee to happen to Mexican workers. It is a Faustian bargain indeed.

Picketers who could meet after the action discussed some basic facts. There was no literature to hand out. The short time it took to organize and mobilize prevented any literature from being printed. A solution would to have a stock of non-specific fliers suitable for any occasion on hand. The same with picket signs. Some Wobs keep an IWW flag in the back of their vehicle for just such spur of the moment actions. The women and men who were part of the picket agreed it was an effective act of solidarity and the next one will be more effective through planning and with literature at hand.

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month.

- ☐ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- ☐ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- ☐ I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.





Well, like a bad penny, or a bad boss, here I am again, I apologize to you all for missing our rendezvous last month. I was away on secret wobbly business, looking for WMDs in Washington, D.C. At least I can say for certain that the ruling class has them.

★ ★ ★

The UK's *Weekly Worker* newspaper suggests that "if Saddam is to be put on trial for his life for crimes committed fundamentally on behalf of Iraq and world capitalism, then the paymasters and godfathers of this relatively small-time hoodlum should also face the same process. If Saddam is to face the prospect of execution, then so should Bush and Blair."

★ ★ ★

While Valentine's Day was last month, here's a first (I think most folks would hope a last): a Wobbly love song.

Three Times a Wobbly (tune: Three Times a Lady)

Thanks for the organizing, That you've given us, The memories are all in my mind,
And now that we've come, To the workers' commonwealth,
There's something I must say out loud, You're once, twice, Three times a Wobbly
Yes you're once, twice, Three times a Wobbly.

It's Solidarity Forever, When we are together, The moments I cherish,
With every beat of my heart, To beat the bosses with you, To organize with you
There's nothing to keep us apart, You're once, twice, Three times a Wobbly
It's Solidarity Forever, Solidarity Forever.

★ ★ ★

New Words for 2004: Essential additions for the workplace vocabulary:

Blamestorming: Sitting around in a group, discussing why a deadline was missed or a project failed, and who was responsible.

Seagull Manager: A manager who flies in, makes a lot of noise, craps on everything, and then leaves.

Assmosis: The process by which some people seem to absorb success and advancement by kissing up to the boss rather than working hard.

Salmon Day: The experience of spending an entire day swimming upstream only to get screwed and die in the end.

Cube Farm: An office filled with cubicles.

Prairie Dogging: When someone yells or drops something loudly in a cube farm, and people's heads pop up over the walls to see what's going on.

Mouse Potato: The on-line, wired generation's answer to the couch potato.

Sitcoms: Single Income, Two Children, Oppressive Mortgage. What yuppies turn into when they have children and one of them stops working to stay home with the kids.

Stress Puppy: A person who seems to thrive on being stressed out and whiney.

Swipeout: An ATM or credit card that has been rendered useless because the magnetic strip is worn away from extensive use.

Xerox Subsidy: Euphemism for swiping photocopies from one's workplace copy machine.

Irritainment: Entertainment and media spectacles that are annoying but you find yourself unable to stop watching them. The J-Lo and Ben wedding (or not) was a prime example.

Percussive Maintenance: The fine art of whacking the crap out of an electronic device to get it to work again.

Adminisphere: The rarefied organizational layers beginning just above the rank and file. Decisions that fall from the adminisphere are often profoundly inappropriate or irrelevant to the problems they were designed to solve.

404: Someone who's clueless. From the World Wide Web error message "404 Not Found," meaning that the requested document could not be located.

Generic: Features of the American landscape that are exactly the same no matter where one is, such as fast food joints, strip malls and subdivisions.

Ohnosecond: That minuscule fraction of time in which you realize that you've just made a big mistake.

WOOFs: Well-Off Older Folks.

★ ★ ★

From the NY Times: "When Congress established OSHA in 1970, it made it a misdemeanor to cause the death of a worker by willfully violating safety laws. The maximum sentence, six months in jail, is half the maximum for harassing a wild burro on federal lands."

★ ★ ★

Speaking of songs, here's the beginning of one for those Pie Cards bargaining behind closed doors for "their" membership...

"When the union's power through the workers blood shall run
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun
So what bureaucrats should do is to meet on the run
Anonymity makes us strong. Anonymity Forever..."

★ ★ ★

U.S. President George Bush, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and Spanish Prime Minister José Aznar have announced the formation of the Axis of Weasels. Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi immediately filed a protest for being refused into the axis, "Why everyone knows I'm the biggest weasel of them all, certainly bigger than that punk Aznar..."

★ ★ ★

"I remember how handicapped my union, the Newspaper Guild, always was by the fact that reporters who called their editors by their first names and drank with them misunderstood their relationship at contract time. Much of the membership would act personally hurt and aggrieved by betrayed friendship – or else they would refuse to believe that their friends were acting in opposition to them."

★ ★ ★

They are having a panel look into the intelligence failures in Iraq but the findings will not be issued until after the election. President Bush says the commission can go off and report back in a year, you know, the same way it works in the Texas National Guard.

As always FN. 'Frank' Brill will love to hear from you, and bears sole responsibility for his views, even the ones only implicit to paranoid readers. He may be contacted via e-mail at fnbrill@yahoo.com. Those impaired by the latter half of the 20th century may write with quill, parchment and wax seal to FN Brill, c/o IWW, 616 E Burnside, Portland OR 97214 USA #1

U.S. union rate plummeting

The proportion of U.S. workers who belong to labor unions continued a 20-year decline last year, dropping to 12.9 percent of wage and salary workers – from 13.3 percent in 2002, according to the U.S. Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Union membership in the private sector fell from 8.8 million workers in 2002 to 8.45 million in 2003. Only 8.2 percent of private sector workers now belong to unions, the lowest since the government began collecting this data. Much of the decline can be attributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs last year. But few unions have had success organizing new workers in recent years, stymied by a combination of fierce employer resistance, a hostile labor law regime, and organizing strategies that have not adapted to modern industrial realities.

Union membership fell both as a percentage of the workforce and in the total number of workers belonging to unions, which fell by 369,000 workers to 15.8 million.

Public sector unions lost 22,000 members, primarily as a result of lay-offs, falling from 37.3 percent in 2002 to 37.2 percent in 2003. The unionization rate has held steady for government workers since 1983. The rate for private sector workers has fallen by half over that 20-year period.

AFL-CIO Organizing Director Stewart Acuff attributed the decline to a combination of the Bush administration's economic policies and the obstacles faced by U.S. workers in trying to organize since they "lack the fundamental right to form a union."

While Acuff said AFL-CIO unions had major new organizing campaigns under way, "No matter how creative we are ... it will never make up for the lack of fundamental union rights for American workers to organize, to freely associate, engage in free speech, and form a union. This has been the state of affairs we have been in for some time now. Until we resolve that, we're going to see these kind of numbers," Acuff said.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that younger and part-time workers are far less likely to belong to unions. Only 5.1 percent of workers under age 25 are union members.

Union members continue, on average, to earn higher wages than their non-union counterparts. The average full-time union worker

was paid \$760 a week in 2003, compared to \$599 for workers not represented by unions. The gap is larger for women (\$696 vs \$523), African-American (\$665 vs \$491) and Latino (\$632 vs \$419) workers.

AFL leaders are the problem

BY HARRY KELBER

When John Sweeney became AFL-CIO president in 1995, he said that organizing would be his top priority. Nevertheless, last year AFL unions organized only 142,268 new members, compared with 446,039 in 2001.

In 1995, organized labor represented 14.9% of the nation's work force. Today, nine years later, it has dropped to only 12.9%.

What went wrong? AFL-CIO leaders say the reason why millions of workers don't join unions is because their employers have many ways to deter them, with a variety of threats that include firing them.

Of course, there's truth in that. Ever since the dawn of the industrial revolution, very few employers have looked kindly on unions. That didn't prevent the CIO in the late 1930s from organizing millions of workers.

In all the years that Sweeney and the 51-member policy-making Executive Council have been in office, they haven't figured out how to arrest the continuing decline in the labor movement. They've been blind and deaf to some obvious faults that need to be corrected if the labor movement is to regain its former strength. Here are some major reasons for the shrinking labor movement.

The AFL-CIO is no longer relevant to non-union workers. It has done nothing to help the millions of unemployed, except issuing statements of sympathy and blaming the Bush administration for their plight. They have the power and resources to help the jobless to organize themselves for public works jobs and extended unemployment insurance benefits. They haven't. Why not?

Corporations, even highly profitable ones have "downsized" tens of thousands of workers, while the AFL-CIO has remained silent. Good-paying manufacturing jobs are being moved out of the country, but the AFL-CIO has done nothing to try to stop the exodus, except to berate the companies for doing it.

More than 40 million people are without health insurance, while health care costs are

continued on page 10

Worst child labour laws in North America? Try British Columbia

BY GRAEME MOORE

FW Graeme Moore was, until recently, a provincial inspector. Part of this job involved making sure that child labor was strictly regulated. No longer. The global corporate agenda has been well underway in other parts of North America, but BC was temporarily shielded from the more horrific aspects of this agenda. But now BC is leading North America with absolutely no regulations with respect to child labour.

As of December 14, in British Columbia children between the ages of 12 and 14 can work at least 20 hours a week, any time, in any business within provincial jurisdiction with only one parent's approval. Businesses within provincial jurisdiction include agriculture; manufacture, which includes at-home garment production; retail, which includes selling door-to-door; and service, which includes food preparing and office and store cleaning. All that an employer needs to put a child as young as 12 years old to work is the written consent of one parent, even if the other parent objects. When the employer is the parent, in effect it is a letter to oneself.

Child employment law in BC has gone from, "A person must not employ a child under the age of 15 without the director's permission" to "A person must not employ a child under 15 years of age unless the person has obtained the written consent of the child's parent or guardian." Previously, a parent's written consent was a necessary but not suf-

ficient condition to employ a child under age 15; now, it is all that is needed. Previously, the Director of Employment Standards investigated applications for child employment permits to certify that the work and the workplace were safe for a child and the hours of work appropriate. Previously, school principals determined if the proposed employment interfered with the child's education.

BC government contends that children are safer and better protected without the Director ensuring that the work, hours of work and workplace are safe and suitable for children, and without school authorities ensuring that education comes first.

The only remaining constraints on employment of children between ages 12 and 15 are that the child not work:

- during their school time;
- more than 4 hours on school days
- more than 7 hours on non-school days
- more than 20 hours a week in a week with five school days,
- more than 35 hours a week in a week with fewer than five school days, and
- without immediate supervision of an adult (age 19 and older).

There are no prohibited sectors, like mining; no prohibited occupations, like door-to-door sales; no prohibition against working graveyard shifts. Moreover, the Director of Employment Standards can waive the above "constraints" on application!

The police assault on labor and anti-war protesters

BY JACK HEYMAN, ILWU

Last April 7, just as the morning sun was rising over the hills east of San Francisco Bay, Darth Vader-clad riot police in the port of Oakland opened fire on some 700 people demonstrating peacefully against the war in Iraq. Police fired lead-shot bean bags, wooden dowels, rubber bullets, tear gas and stinger grenades. Dozens were injured. Twenty-four demonstrators and I were arrested.

A Bay Area group called Direct Action to Stop the War that organized the picket line had specified that it was "not a civil disobedience action" and the goal was "not to get arrested." But the bloody police response turned the demonstration into what *The New York Times* called "the most violent (clash) between protesters and authorities anywhere in the country since the start of the war."

For more than 90 minutes battle-gearred cops charged on foot in military formation and simultaneously in a phalanx of motor-cycle cossacks, a policy long since abandoned by police forces of most major cities. The *Times* got it wrong. This was not a bloody confrontation between two clashing forces. Demonstrators were fleeing the police, which is why so many were shot in the back with so-called "less-than-lethal" weapons. Peter Keane, former dean of the Golden Gate Law School, said that "prosecution of the Oakland Port peace protestors is the most shameful threat to political dissent in America since the brutal assaults and arrests of civil rights marchers in 1960's Selma, Alabama."

The anti-war activists were not the only victims of police violence. Nine members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union reporting for work were hit when police opened fire. Five were sent to the hospital, one with a painful and bloody complex hand fracture when he was hit by a police projectile. Police had not fired weapons against longshoremen since the maritime strike of 1934, when six workers were killed, one by a projectile to the head similar to the one that hit the longshoreman that morning.

But this was not a police riot – the authorities had planned their bloody tactics well in advance. Maritime employers met with

police and the Port Commission April 4 to coordinate a plan to quash what was widely known would take place in the port three days later. Two days earlier, the California Anti-Terrorist Information Center – a state agency quietly formed two weeks after 9/11 by then-Governor Gray Davis and Attorney General Bill Lockyer (both liberal Democrats) – had sent an ominous bulletin to the Oakland police warning that "potential violence ... may be associated with the advertised protest," thus giving a green light to police actions. Police plans included commandeering the port's intermodal yard as a prisoner detention area and police headquarters. They also gathered anti-war announcements on the Internet and monitored email messages from the ILWU chat room. The ACLU has sharply criticized this police spying as a violation of constitutionally protected free speech.

After the police attack, CATIC spokesman Van Winkle ripped into civil liberties using a chilling justification: "If you have a protest group protesting a war where the cause that's being fought against is international terrorism, ... you can almost argue that a protest against that is a terrorist act." He went on to explain that terrorism can be "anything that has an economic impact," presumably like a union picket line, a solidarity action or a civil rights boycott.

The protest had targeted the Iraq war profiteers, American President Lines and Stevedoring Services of America. APL ships carry war materiel and SSA received a "no bid" contract to run the port of Umm Qasr, newly privatized by military action, in large part by British troops. In a fallout amongst thieves, the "no bid" port contract caused ruffled feathers amongst British companies who felt well-qualified to take on Iraqi dockworkers.

On the Oakland homefront police moved in, when according to Police Chief Word, "the two shipping companies ... asked (OPD) to disperse the crowd because the demonstration ... was disrupting business." Pending misdemeanor charges range from "trespassing" to "creating a public nuisance" to "resisting arrest" to "interfering with a business."

Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, once a self-styled "progressive," is now keen on promoting business. He defended the police action, saying protesters wanted to stop port truck-



Oakland 25 trial date nears

PHOTO: JEFF PATTERSON, INDYMEDIA

A trial date has been set for March 8 for the Oakland 25, arrested last April when police opened fire on a picket line targeting two military contractors on the Oakland waterfront. A judge rejected motions to dismiss the charges Feb. 6 and has not ruled on defense motions to compel prosecutors to hand over police reports and other prosecution evidence.

Supporters packed the courtroom for pretrial hearings Jan. 9 and Feb. 6, unfurling banners outside the courthouse and distributing information on the case to passersby. More than 200 joined the Feb. 6 rally, which featured injured ILWU member Killy Kepoo, representatives of several unions, and a delegation of four dockworkers from Charleston, South Carolina, who had come to show their solidarity.

ILWU business agent Jack Heyman, one of the Oakland 25, announced that the San Francisco longshoremen have voted to hold a stop work meeting March 20 to protest the war in Iraq, exercising a provision in their contract allowing them to stop work once a month for union meetings. "We will demand an end to the war, an end to the occupation and the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops now!" he said.

Although Oakland officials promised a full investigation into the 90-minute police attack, injuring dozens of picketers and dock workers who were respecting the picket line, the investigation never got off the ground.

ers and he wasn't going to let that happen. Yet in 1998, to acquire "labor credentials" in his bid for mayor, he joined a picket line at the port in solidarity with sacked dockers in Liverpool, England, stopping trucks at a terminal gate associated with the same company, SSA. Obviously, he has abandoned even the political pretense of sailing on labor's ship for the more profitable buccaneers: business and "national security." Brown, who served as governor of California from 1975 to 1983, is now reportedly eyeing a bid as "law and order" candidate for Attorney General under Governor Schwarzenegger.

As seen in the recent brutal police response to anti-FTAA protesters in Miami, a repressive pattern is beginning to emerge under the aegis of "protecting national security" and global business interests, especially in ports. Like the state's anti-terrorism agency,

a Port Safety and Security Plan for San Francisco Bay that's been drafted by a multi-agency committee headed by the U.S. Coast Guard does not distinguish between terrorists, labor unions and anti-war groups.

In 2002, during the longshore union contract negotiations Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and Homeland Security Czar Ridge threatened the union that if there were any jobs actions on the docks, troops would be called out to occupy the ports. Then, when for 10 days the maritime employers shut down all of the ports on the West Coast by locking out longshore workers, the Bush administration did nothing. As soon as the lockout was lifted the Bush administration, without a peep from the Democrats, invoked Taft-Hartley, the slave labor act, forcing longshoremen back to work under conditions demanded by employers. Such "iron heel" maneuvers only show that "national security" like the Iraq war are advanced to promote business interests and shackle those of the working class.

If dockworkers don't have the right to protest in ports because they're deemed to be "national security zones," then international maritime companies, regardless of union contracts, are given a "free hand": free to hire whomever they want, pay as little as they want and disregard any safety or environmental issues. Since World War II, the ILWU has had a legacy of opposing U.S. imperial wars like the one in Iraq and U.S.-backed military dictatorships like Pinochet's in Chile, while supporting progressive struggles internationally like the anti-apartheid struggle and the Cuban revolution. Attempts by the Oakland police and the Bush administration to stop or change the ILWU's progressive direction will not go unchallenged.

Excerpted from www.counterpunch.org.
For more on the case: www.defendilwuba.com

Still hawkish at AFL

Many union members hoped the election of John Sweeney to head the AFL-CIO eight years ago meant an end to the federation's days as a front for the CIA and a shill for U.S. foreign policy.

Not only has the AFL rebuffed efforts to open the books on that era, in a little-noticed statement delivered Nov. 6, Sweeney uncritically reaffirmed the federation's support for the National Endowment for Democracy, established 20 years ago by the Reagan administration to promote the capitalist system and U.S. foreign policy. Sweeney also used the occasion to support U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's Iraq policy, offering the AFL's help in efforts to reconstruct Iraq and promote "legitimate" unions there.

ONLINE PICKET LINE

Eric Lee



Radio LabourStart teaching workers to sing

BY ERIC LEE

The Wobblies taught the labour movement to sing. I was reminded of this a couple of years ago in the city of Incheon, South Korea. I was part of an international delegation of people from metal workers' unions and we were paying a courtesy call on the leaders of the Daewoo car workers. At the time, they were holed up in the city's cathedral, where they had sought asylum from the police.

Each of us was asked to say a few words to the hundreds of Daewoo workers who were encamped on the cathedral grounds. One of those who spoke was a UAW member (and a Wobbly) who grabbed the microphone with a courage which I could never muster and sang "Solidarity Forever." I'm not sure how much the Korean auto workers understood of the song's lyrics, or if they knew its history, but I, for one, was deeply touched.

Maybe it was at that moment that the idea for Radio LabourStart gelled in my mind.

I have long been convinced the Internet could be more than text and still images on websites. In fact, in my 1996 book on the subject of unions and the Internet, I had a chapter on streaming multimedia and its potential uses by trade

unions. More than seven years have passed since I wrote that, and unfortunately, little progress has been made.

Perhaps the most ambitious step so far was the launch of the Workers Independent News Service, which can be found on the web at www.laborradio.org. WINS is a great idea, but they've limited themselves to producing a daily three-minute news summary and some features, and these are made available to "real" radio stations to be played to a large audience. A great idea – but not the kind of online labour radio station I was dreaming of.

A great labour radio station would start out on the web, but also be available for rebroadcast via FM and AM stations, satellite and through whatever other means become available. It should be multi-lingual, reaching out to the workers of the world in their own languages. It should include news, features, interviews and music – lots of music.

The idea is radical and it is subversive to its core. Imagine, if you will, workers in any modern workplace who are chained to desks instead of machines, and on whose desks sit computers with high-speed Internet connections. There are millions of such workers, the vast majority of them not union members, often working in environments which are extremely hostile to unions.

Studies show that millions of workers listen to Internet radio stations during their workday. Some of those stations are Internet versions of conventional stations while others are Internet-only. Millions of people sit at their desks, in offices and schools, doing their jobs, listening to music.

Now, imagine that more and more of them discover Radio LabourStart (<http://radio.labourstart.org>), which was launched

in February. Instead of the latest top tunes from MTV, they begin to discover songs like "Solidarity Forever." At first the bosses may not notice. And people will listen because it's just one of those subversive little things one does in one's workplace.

People will listen to Radio LabourStart because they're told not to. They'll listen because when they discover the half-forgotten world of workers' songs, they're going to find the experience liberating and wonderful. They'll listen too because they want to hear union news and they want to hear telephone interviews with workers on picket lines and with unionists in jail.

Never underestimate the effect of radio as a subversive tool – 1989 would never have been possible without Radio Free Europe, with all its flaws. For millions of people living under one-party regimes, the BBC World Service is a vital source of information. A union radio station, broadcasting 24/7 to a global audience, will play no less a subversive and liberating role.

Radio LabourStart isn't yet that station. It is already playing a nice mix of labour songs and songs of protest and social justice. It's airing the daily WINS news and some news stories of its own, taken off the LabourStart website. It broadcast a couple of interviews in its first two weeks on air.

But we have a long way to go. I'm delighted to be announcing the launch of this station in my own union's newspaper because as I said at the beginning – the Wobblies taught the labor movement to sing. I look forward to working with you on this exciting project, and to use Internet radio, as we have already used websites and email, to change the world.

Do turkeys enjoy Thanksgiving?



BY ARUNDHATI ROY

The following is the text of Roy's plenary speech to World Social Forum delegates:

Last January thousands of us from across the world gathered in Porto Alegre in Brazil and declared – reiterated – that “Another World is Possible.” A few thousand miles north, in Washington, George Bush and his aides were thinking the same thing.

Our project was the World Social Forum. Theirs – to further what many call The Project for the New American Century.

In the great cities of Europe and America, where a few years ago these things would only have been whispered, now people are openly talking about the good side of Imperialism and the need for a strong Empire to police an unruly world. The new missionaries want order at the cost of justice. Discipline at any price. Occasionally some of us are invited to “debate” the issue on “neutral” platforms provided by the corporate media. Debating Imperialism is a bit like debating the pros and cons of rape. What can we say? That we really miss it?

In any case, New Imperialism is already upon us. It's a remodelled, streamlined version of what we once knew. For the first time in history, a single Empire with an arsenal of weapons that could obliterate the world in an afternoon has complete, unipolar, economic and military hegemony. It uses different weapons to break open different markets. There isn't a country on God's earth that is not caught in the cross hairs of the American cruise missile and the IMF chequebook. Argentina's the model if you want to be the poster-boy of neoliberal capitalism, Iraq if you're the black sheep.

Poor countries that are geopolitically of strategic value to Empire, or have a “market” of any size, or infrastructure that can be privatized, or, god forbid, natural resources of value – oil, gold, diamonds, cobalt, coal – must do as they're told, or become military targets. Those with the greatest reserves of natural wealth are most at risk. Unless they surrender their resources willingly to the corporate machine, civil unrest will be fomented, or war will be waged.

In this new age of Empire, when nothing is as it appears to be, executives of concerned companies are allowed to influence foreign policy decisions. The Centre for Public Integrity in Washington found that nine out of the 30 members of the Defence Policy Board of the U.S. Government were connected to companies that were awarded defence contracts for \$ 76 billion between 2001 and 2002. George Shultz, former U.S. Secretary of State, was Chairman of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. He is also on the board of directors of the Bechtel Group. When asked about a conflict of interest, in the case of a war in Iraq he said, “I don't know that Bechtel would particularly benefit from it. But if there's work to be done, Bechtel is the type of company that could do it. But nobody looks at it as something you benefit from.” After the war, Bechtel signed a \$680 million contract for reconstruction in Iraq.

This brutal blueprint has been used over and over again, across Latin America, Africa,

Central and South-East Asia. It has cost millions of lives. It goes without saying that every war Empire wages becomes a Just War. This, in large part, is due to the role of the corporate media. It's important to understand that the corporate media doesn't just support the neo-liberal project. It is the neo-liberal project. This is not a moral position it has chosen to take, it's structural. It's intrinsic to the economics of how the mass media works.

Most nations have adequately hideous family secrets. So it isn't often necessary for the media to lie. It's what's emphasized and what's ignored. Say for example India was chosen as the target for a righteous war. The fact that about 80,000 people have been killed in Kashmir since 1989, most of them Muslim, most of them by Indian Security Forces (making the average death toll about 6000 a year); the fact that less than a year ago, in March of 2003, more than 2,000 Muslims were murdered on the streets of Gujarat, that women were gang-raped and children were burned alive and 150,000 people driven from their homes while the police and administration watched, and sometimes actively participated; the fact that no one has been punished for these crimes and the government that oversaw them was re-elected ... all of this would make perfect headlines in international newspapers in the run-up to war.

Next we know, our cities will be levelled by cruise missiles, our villages fenced in with razor wire, U.S. soldiers will patrol our streets and, Narendra Modi, Pravin Togadia or any of our popular bigots could, like Saddam Hussein, be in U.S. custody, having their hair checked for lice and the fillings in their teeth examined on prime-time TV.

But as long as our “markets” are open, as long as corporations like Enron, Bechtel, Halliburton, Arthur Andersen are given a free hand, our “democratically elected” leaders can fearlessly blur the lines between democracy, majoritarianism and fascism.

Our government's craven willingness to abandon India's proud tradition of being Non-Aligned, its rush to fight its way to the head of the queue of the Completely Aligned (the fashionable phrase is “natural ally” – India, Israel and the U.S. are “natural allies”), has given it the leg room to turn into a repressive regime without compromising its legitimacy.

A government's victims are not only those that it kills and imprisons. Those who are displaced and dispossessed and sentenced to a lifetime of starvation and deprivation must count among them too. Millions of people have been dispossessed by “development” projects. In the past 55 years, Big Dams alone have displaced between 33 million and 55 million people in India. They have no recourse to justice.

In the last two years there has been a series of incidents when police have opened fire on peaceful protestors, most of them Adivasi and Dalit. When it comes to the poor, and in particular Dalit and Adivasi communities, they get killed for encroaching on forest land, and killed when they're trying to protect forest land from encroachments – by dams, mines, steel plants and other “development” projects. In almost every instance in which the police opened fire, the government's strategy has been to say the firing was provoked by an act of violence. Those who have been fired upon are immediately called militants.

Across the country, thousands of innocent people including minors have been arrested under POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) and are being held in jail indefinitely and without trial. In the era of the War against Terror, poverty is being slyly conflated with terrorism. In the era of corporate globalization, poverty is a crime. Protesting against

further impoverishment is terrorism. And now our Supreme Court says that going on strike is a crime. Criticizing the court of course is a crime, too. They're sealing the exits.

Like Old Imperialism, New Imperialism too relies for its success on a network of agents – corrupt, local elites who service Empire. We all know the sordid story of Enron in India. The then Maharashtra Government signed a power purchase agreement which gave Enron profits that amounted to sixty per cent of India's entire rural development budget. A single American company was guaranteed a profit equivalent to funds for infrastructural development for about 500 million people!

Unlike in the old days the New Imperialist doesn't need to trudge around the tropics risking malaria or diarrhoea or early death. New Imperialism can be conducted on e-mail. The vulgar, hands-on racism of Old Imperialism is outdated. The cornerstone of New Imperialism is New Racism.

The tradition of ‘turkey pardoning’ in the U.S. is a wonderful allegory for New Racism. Every year since 1947, the National Turkey Federation presents the U.S. President with a turkey for

Thanksgiving. Every year, in a show of ceremonial magnanimity, the President spares that particular bird (and eats another one). After receiving the presidential pardon, the Chosen One is sent to Frying Pan Park in Virginia to live out its natural life. The rest of the 50 million turkeys raised for Thanksgiving are slaughtered and eaten on Thanksgiving Day. ConAgra Foods, the company that has won the Presidential Turkey contract, says it trains the lucky birds to be sociable, to interact with dignitaries, school children and the press. (Soon they'll even speak English!)

That's how New Racism in the corporate era works. A few carefully bred turkeys – the local elites of various countries, a community of wealthy immigrants, investment bankers, the occasional Colin Powell or Condoleezza Rice, some singers, some writers (like myself) – are given absolution and a pass to Frying Pan Park. The remaining millions lose their jobs, are evicted from their homes, have their water and electricity connections cut, and die of AIDS. Basically they're for the pot. But the Fortunate Fowls in Frying Pan Park are doing fine. Some of them even work for the IMF and the WTO – so who can accuse those organisations of being anti-turkey? Some serve as board members on the Turkey Choosing Committee – so who can say that turkeys are against Thanksgiving? They participate in it! Who can say the poor are anti-corporate globalization? There's a stampede to get into Frying Pan Park. So what if most perish on the way?

Part of the project of New Racism is New Genocide. In this new era of economic interdependence, New Genocide can be facilitated by economic sanctions. It means creating conditions that lead to mass death without actually going out and killing people. Dennis Halliday, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Iraq between '97 and '98 (after which he resigned in disgust), used the term genocide to describe the sanctions in Iraq. In Iraq the sanctions outdid Saddam Hussein's best efforts by claiming more than half a million children's lives.

In the new era, Apartheid as formal policy is antiquated and unnecessary. International instruments of trade and finance oversee a complex system of multilateral trade laws and financial agreements that keep the poor in their Bantustans anyway.

Its whole purpose is to institutionalize inequity. Why else would it be that the U.S. taxes a garment made in Bangladesh 20 times more than it taxes a garment made in the U.K.? Why else would it be that countries

that grow 90 per cent of the world's cocoa bean produce only 5 per cent of the world's chocolate? Why else would it be that countries that grow cocoa bean, like the Ivory Coast and Ghana, are taxed out of the market if they try and turn it into chocolate? Why else would it be that rich countries that spend over a billion dollars a day on subsidies to farmers demand that poor countries like India withdraw all agricultural subsidies, including subsidized electricity? Why else would it be that after having been plundered by colonizing regimes for more than half a century, former colonies are steeped in debt to those same regimes, and repay them some \$382 billion a year?

For all these reasons, the derailing of trade agreements at Cancun was crucial for us. Though our governments try and take the credit, we know that it was the result of years of struggle by many millions of people in many, many countries. What Cancun taught us is that in order to inflict real damage and force radical change, it is vital for local resistance movements to make international alliances. From Cancun we learned the importance of globalizing resistance.

No individual nation can stand up to the project of Corporate Globalization on its own. Time and again we have seen that when it comes to the neo-liberal project, the heroes of our times are suddenly diminished. Extraordinary, charismatic men, giants in Opposition, when they seize power and become Heads of State, they become powerless on the global stage. I'm thinking here of President Lula of Brazil. Lula was the hero of the World Social Forum last year. This year he's busy implementing IMF guidelines, reducing pension benefits and purging radicals from the Workers' Party. I'm thinking also of ex-President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

Within two years of taking office in 1994, his government genuflected with hardly a caveat to the Market God. It instituted a massive program of privatization which has left millions of people homeless, jobless and without water and electricity.

Why does this happen? There's little point in beating our breasts and feeling betrayed. Lula and Mandela are, by any reckoning, magnificent men. But the moment they cross the floor from the Opposition into Government they become hostage to a spectrum of threats – most malevolent among them the threat of capital flight, which can destroy any government overnight. To imagine that a leader's personal charisma and a c.v. of struggle will dent the Corporate Cartel is to have no understanding of how Capitalism works, or for that matter, how power works. Radical change will not be negotiated by governments; it can only be enforced by people.

This week at the World Social Forum, some of the best minds in the world will exchange ideas about what is happening around us. These conversations refine our vision of the kind of world we're fighting for. It is a vital process that must not be undermined. However, if all our energies are diverted into this process at the cost of real political action, then the WSF, which has played such a crucial role in the Movement for Global Justice, runs the risk of becoming an asset to our enemies.

What we need to discuss urgently is strategies of resistance. We need to aim at real targets, wage real battles and inflict real damage. Gandhi's Salt March was not just political theatre. When, in a simple act of defiance, thousands of Indians marched to the sea and made their own salt, they broke the salt tax laws. It was a direct strike at the economic underpinning of the British Empire. It was real. While our movement has won some important victories, we must not allow non-

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100,000 attend World Social Forum in India

The World Social Forum is the grassroots answer to the annual World Economic Forum which draws an unsavory crowd of Western politicians, corporate CEOs and other power brokers to Davos, Switzerland, to network – protected from protestors by thousands of riot cops.

The Fourth World Social Forum was held January 17-20 in Mumbai, India. The initial three Forums were held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. This change of location brought with it a change in participation – where past Forum participants have been predominantly South American, with a significant U.S. and European presence, this year most participants were from Asia, with substantial African participation as well. All told, participants came from 132 different countries, representing over 2,500 different organizations.

Mumbai itself provided a sharp daily reminder of why the World Social Forum was launched. A decaying industrial and financial center formerly known as Bombay, Mumbai has borne the brunt of India's economic liberalization policies, with millions losing their jobs. The Forum met in abandoned industrial buildings surrounded by desperate poverty, in a society riven with caste divisions and ruled by a government that brutalizes the Muslim minority, when it isn't try to exterminate them.

Participants describe an event riven with contradictions. Lacking the government resources available to past Social Forums, organizers in Mumbai made do as best they could – resulting in sometimes uncomfortable meeting spaces, inadequate translation facilities, and a jumble of competing sessions that left many participants bewildered. For those unsatisfied with the offerings, an alternative gathering across the street – Mumbai Resistance, organized by the Maoist Communist Party of India – drew thousands of people to a more orthodox brand of radical politics.

Arundhati Roy...

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violent resistance to atrophy into ineffectual, feel-good, political theatre. It is a very precious weapon that needs to be constantly honed and re-imagined. It cannot be allowed to become a mere spectacle, a photo opportunity for the media.

It was wonderful that on February 15th last year, in a spectacular display of public morality, 10 million people in five continents marched against the war on Iraq. It was wonderful, but it was not enough. February 15th was a weekend. Nobody had to so much as miss a day of work. Holiday protests don't stop wars. George Bush knows that. The confidence with which he disregarded overwhelming public opinion should be a lesson to us all. Bush believes that Iraq can be occupied and colonized – as Afghanistan has been, as Tibet has been, as Chechnya is being, as East Timor once was and Palestine still is. He thinks that all he has to do is hunker down and wait until a crisis-driven media, having picked this crisis to the bone, drops it and moves on. Soon the carcass will slip off the best-seller charts, and all of us outraged folks will lose interest. Or so he hopes.

This movement of ours needs a major, global victory. It's not good enough to be right. Sometimes, if only in order to test our resolve, it's important to win something. In order to win something, we – all of us gathered here and a little way away at Mumbai Resistance – need to agree on something. That something

Building human relations

India has become part of globalization's "race to the bottom" in which corporations move around the globe looking for the lowest-paid workforces. Jobs from America and Europe's call centers are being relocated to India and there may now be more IT engineers in Bangalore than in the Silicon Valley. Some 50,000 young Indians are employed in call centres in Mumbai, earning a mere \$160 per month on all-night shifts (necessary to accommodate the fact that they are answering calls from halfway around the globe).

The World Social Forum offers a useful opportunity for unionists and other activists working around such issues to come together, to exchange information, and to explore possibilities for common action. The networks build in Porto Alegre, for example, helped to build last year's successful global demonstrations against the war in Iraq. To the extent that workers come to know one another, and to know the conditions of one another's lives

and work, not only will it become more difficult for capital to pit us against each other; we will have laid the material foundations for our own solidarity.

But however useful such sessions may be, this year many more people were marching and celebrating outside the formal venues than attended the scheduled workshops and panels. Michael Albert suggests in his report on the Forum that the formal proceedings may have had limited appeal. "As with other WSFs most of the presentations were about how bad

globalization, capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and caste relations, not to mention Hindu fundamentalism, are. The people parading all day outside the talks knew all this without having to hear it.

"Does it really make any sense to get up on a stage and talk about the ills of poverty and of indignity in a city like this, where

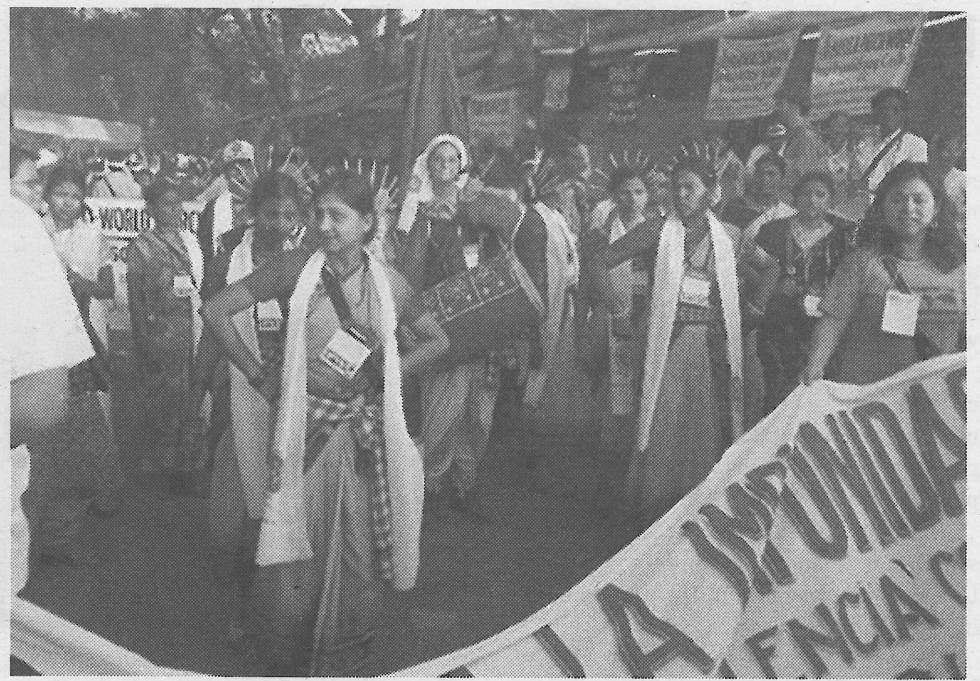
does not need to be an over-arching preordained ideology into which we force-fit our delightfully factious, argumentative selves. It does not need to be an unquestioning allegiance to one or another form of resistance to the exclusion of everything else. It could be a minimum agenda.

If all of us are indeed against Imperialism and against the project of neo-liberalism, then let's turn our gaze on Iraq. Iraq is the inevitable culmination of both. Plenty of anti-war activists have retreated in confusion since the capture of Saddam Hussein. Isn't the world better off without Saddam Hussein? they ask timidly.

Let's look this thing in the eye once and for all. To applaud the U.S. army's capture of Saddam Hussein and therefore, in retrospect, justify its invasion and occupation of Iraq is like deifying Jack the Ripper for disemboweling the Boston Strangler. And that – after a quarter century partnership in which the Ripping and Strangling was a joint enterprise. It's an in-house quarrel. They're business partners who fell out over a dirty deal. Jack's the CEO.

So if we are against Imperialism, shall we agree that we are against the U.S. occupation and that we believe that the U.S. must withdraw from Iraq and pay reparations to the Iraqi people for the damage that the war has inflicted?

How do we begin to mount our resistance? Let's start with something really small. The issue is not about supporting the resistance in Iraq against the occupation or dis-



walking five minutes in any direction outside the gates of our event offers incontrovertible evidence of the claims – evidence so powerful, so humbling, so sickening, and so overwhelming, that no speaker could possibly expand on its message?"

Instead, the street that ran through the center of the WSF grounds was packed from sunrise to sunset with processions of dancers and drummers – jubilant expressions of resistance from around the world.

A steady series of demonstrations also gave voice to participants too weary to sit through another workshop. One theme was water rights. Around the world, privately owned companies are taking control over this vital public resource and turning it into a commodity. Three Indian communities experiencing severe water shortages as a result of Coca-Cola's draining of common groundwater resources around its factories organized a rally as part of a broader global campaign.

In the village of Plachimada, Coke's factory guzzles enough water every day for 20,000 people, while generations-old irrigation wells run dry. "Coca-Cola's actions are symbolic of the vulgar arrogance and criminal power of corporations that are looting people of their basic needs, water in this case," said Medha Patkar, coordinator of the National Alliance of People's Movements.

Another world is possible

That slogan is constantly repeated – to the point where it is like an advertising tag. And participants are increasingly trying to move beyond a review of the crimes endemic

to the global capitalist order to envisioning the possibilities for a different society.

"This forum will blow up the myth that there is no alternative," said Indian unionist Varada Rajan. "It will also explode the myth that this model of globalization has universal acceptance."

But few people made the long journey to reaffirm that basic idea. Certainly, a major part of international gatherings such as this is the exchange of information – and the joy of meeting people from halfway across the planet working on the same issue, exchanging ideas and planting the seeds for future collaboration. But some participants also argue that the Forum needs to move beyond this to articulating some sort of common strategy for addressing corporate globalization or the drive toward war.

Participants come from a wide array of political tendencies and activist organizations, with quite different concerns, experiences and possibilities. Getting such a diverse group to agree on a common platform or strategy specific enough to be possible – especially in the space of the few days participants are together – is probably impossible.

But some veterans of the Social Forums argue that the Forum is losing its momentum, and its sense of the possibility of building that new world. Albert suggests shifting the panels and workshops away from descriptions and analyses of oppression toward issues of vision, strategy, and practical lessons from what people are doing around the world.

"But even this reorienting of focus, as positive as it would be, would still leave us with a gigantic apparatus being used only to talk, dance, sing and otherwise experience one another's views and styles, and to do so only for a few days each year. Can't the WSF apparatus do something that is more sustained, without pulling apart inwardly?" Albert asks.

He suggests the Forum put its weight behind a program of supporting alternative media – creating a continual flow of information and ideas – and an aggressive assault on the corporate media which corrupt public discourse around the world.

Several participants also called for building more democratic and accountable structures – both within the Social Forum itself, and within our own organizations, which too often have structures that do not reflect the new world we are trying to create. If we aspire to some sort of participatory democracy on a global level, surely it is incumbent upon us to incorporate these principles into our organizations today.

Boston Social Forum

Progressive community organizations, non-profits and unions will be hosting the Boston Social Forum July 23-25, just before the Democratic National Convention.

Through a series of workshops, cultural events, plenary sessions and convocations of the entire forum, the organizers are encouraging progressive organizations to showcase their best analysis of the present, and their best ideas for the future in the context of corporate globalization. For details or to become involved: www.bostonsocialforum.org

UFCW rank-and-file face betrayal

BY MIKE GRIFFIN

Nobody deserves to win a labor dispute more than locked-out and striking UFCW members involved in the West Coast struggle that idled thousands of grocery workers. The grim reality, however, is that victory is unlikely and, more tragic, that many workers will never get their jobs back.

Consider the history of the UFCW leadership in struggles where the International union caved in with little more than a whimper, then allowed scabs to permanently replace long-term, loyal union members.

No one questions the necessity of this struggle; it is extremely important to every UFCW union member in the retail grocery industry in the U. S. and Canada.

Well before negotiations began, UFCW leaders should have developed a strategy to deal with the enemy on a number of fronts. Coalitions with union and legislative allies, as well as the shopping public, should have been formed. The UFCW should have understood the serious threat of Wal-Martization of the industry. That threat is the vehicle driving the powerful supermarket coalition determined to win at any cost.

That is not to say this struggle was un-winnable; far from it. You must know your enemy and where to apply the thousand points of pain it takes to defeat a determined enemy – and above all else, you must recognize your enemy. For years, the UFCW assumed those major retail grocers were allies and rank and file needs came second.

Thus far, UFCW leaders have engaged a powerful, well-educated enemy with tactics that have not worked for decades, if ever. Unfortunately, they sent their troops into battle nearly unarmed and with no credible battle plan.

Looking back in UFCW history, the P. 9 struggle with Hormel in Austin, Minnesota, comes to mind. The fight with Hormel turned into a major fracas that drew nationwide support; support the international union could not control. In spite of that support and the hopes of hundreds of thousands of union supporters, the UFCW cut a deal with Hormel, took over local P. 9 and replaced the local leadership. Many dedicated UFCW members watched in shock as their lifelong jobs were permanently filled by scabs.

There have been many valiant struggles by UFCW members, but the results are nearly all mirror images with rank-and-file members suffering the losses. Organizing attempts by the UFCW have been as feeble as their efforts to win struggles. Many UFCW members



live with poor wages, little representation and unjust working conditions.

The recent gathering of AFL leaders on the West Coast may appear as a gathering of eagles to desperate striking workers – workers who have needed their support since the beginning and deserve it. But even buzzards

gather and soar before they feast on their prey. Make no mistake, “the dog and pony show” has begun and while the house of labor makes militant speeches and engages in a little street theatre, the UFCW is quietly planning an “exit strategy.” That’s what labor calls it when betrayal is in the works. Workers will be told of the victory they scored. They “saved the union,” they will tell us, and they will spend years rewriting the history of

their betrayal. But the truth will burn forever in the hearts of the members and their families who suffer the losses.

Recently, mainstream media prostitutes are touting the involvement of Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer; suggesting his leadership will bring more militant strategies. Nothing could be further from the truth. My experience tells me the AFL-CIO will spend some money, make a few seemingly militant demonstrations and Trumka will enter the negotiations and a deal will be cut. It will be far from victory and none will be spared the losses except the suits in the UFCW and the AFL-CIO.

The examples are endless. The Detroit Newspaper Strike is but one of many. After being shamed into a national rally in Detroit, Sweeney led more than 100,000 supporters through downtown Detroit to the biggest block party in Detroit’s history; no militancy, no sit-down, and no real effort to win that struggle. The result was a stunning loss that allowed scabs to replace most of the valiant

union workers.

The WarZone struggles in Decatur, Ill., that idled more than 4,000 workers at Firestone, Caterpillar and Staley is another example. When the AFL-CIO refused to engage in those struggles under the feeble leadership of Lane Kirkland, the Staley local loaded up busses and went to Bal Harbor, Fla., to challenge the AFL-CIO. After Kirkland and his band of bureaucrats descended on Decatur a few months later, it was learned that Kirkland was not going to give any real support for the Decatur unions.

At the 1995 convention in New York, after Sweeney claimed the throne, a meeting was set up between local leaders from the Decatur struggles and top officers of the “New Voice” team, including Richard Trumka and Linda Chavez Thompson. They promised massive support – support that never came. The “New Voice” developed laryngitis almost immediately. Sweeney was supposed to meet the Staley local president in London to meet directly with Neil Shaw, CEO of the Staley parent, Tate&Lyle PLC. Instead Sweeney went without local leaders – a deal was cut, and the Decatur local was betrayed. No support

was ever provided the Caterpillar workers or Firestone workers and they too were forced to work side by side with scabs.

Staley workers picketed Paperworkers’ headquarters in Nashville, Tenn., on two occasions and were locked out of the building by security. Local members were brought up on bogus charges and the entire membership and most of the local leadership was evicted from their own union hall by the same police that gassed and terrorized them on the picket lines. Trumka was confronted at a labor forum at the University of Illinois a few months after the betrayal. Months later Sweeney was picketed in Madison, Wisconsin, as a large contingent of Decatur workers carried a large black coffin in front of the speakers stand, signifying the death of their struggle by betrayal. In a meeting with Sweeney after the demonstration, Sweeney promised a letter explaining why he withheld support from the struggles. That letter never came.

The AFL-CIO secretly, or so they thought, flew Father Martin Mangan, the local priest who supported the struggling workers and was arrested at the gates of Staley, to Washington in an effort to stop the protests. When that did not work and Mangan continued his support, Trumka flew into Decatur unannounced to the media and met with 50-plus angry workers at St James Church, Fr. Mangan’s parish. It was a tumultuous meeting and Trumka was quizzed several times about breaking his promises. Each time he responded, “the AFL-CIO cannot render support unless it is requested by the national affiliate.” Translated, We cater to who pays the per capita to the AFL-CIO. Translated, they lied to us in New York after we played a key role in their election. Trumka left Decatur with no credibility.

Knowing this, how would you rate the chances of humble grocery workers? Once again it is time for the big show. How do I know? I saw the show before; I lived with the betrayal. I am a former locked-out Staley worker from the “War Zone,” Decatur, Illinois.

A “strategy” for defeat Tyson strikers surrender

BY MIKE BERNHARD, MADISON

Tyson Foods strikers accepted a contract Jan. 29 that will save their union, but is nearly identical to one voted down Jan. 11, and to the concessions demands that drove workers to strike nearly a year before.

“We’re not getting really what we wanted, but we need to keep the union,” said Bill Schmieder, a six-year Tyson worker. “We’re going to take our fight inside the plant.”

Tyson sought a four-year wage freeze, a reduced wage scale for new workers, elimination of profit-sharing, and cuts in vacation and benefits. It received concessions in all those areas. Strikers will be slowly brought back to work alongside the scabs. Those who are not back to work within a year will retain call-back rights.

The Tyson strike in Jefferson, Wisconsin, is over. The workers settled for the same pay and conditions they rejected one year ago. While Tyson portrayed its last offer as improved, it kept most of the “Ten Commandments,” concessions that gutted decades of gains won through collective struggle.

UFCW attorney Kurt Kobelt notes that federal labor law allows scabs to vote out the union after the one-year anniversary of the strike. “In an economic strike, if a decertification petition is filed, then those on strike are not eligible to vote in an election that is held after the strike has gone on for over a year,” Kobelt explained. “It’s been that way since the 1950s. It’s a ticking time bomb.”

UFCW rep.s told Local 538 members that Tyson has used the tactic before. Even knowing of the possibility of decertification and knowing they were going to fight a nationwide employer, the UFCW made nothing more than cursory attempts at coordinated, collective national action. Instead they supported the contract to “save the union.”

In the California grocery strike, the

UFCW has attempted to sell out the strikers on numerous occasions. Only the militancy and resolve of the workers at the local level is holding the strike together.

It’s a sad day when the strikers are told to fold their tents and go home as a “sign of good faith bargaining.” Once again in the face of large, well-financed, determined opposition the UFCW is “clueless in California” concerning coordinated and inclusive tactics and strategies.

At the Whole Foods organizing campaign in Madison, Wisc., it was the same old story. When the store opened, the UFCW was there with signs and banners. Were these labor activists from UFCW, potential or actual employees, local labor support groups? No! They were non-union, minimum wage temp agency hires with absolutely no idea what was going on or what the slogans on the signs meant. This was a carbon copy of the Cub Foods story in Denver reported by FW Myers in the *Industrial Worker*. Later, when the workers at Whole Foods agitated for a union, the UFCW was there. After the workers won union recognition, the UFCW was invisible except as a negotiating presence. One result of the union’s inactivity was no contract and decertification after one year.

In all these stories the common thread is no national strategy in the face of nationwide opposition. I believe that in the face of the UFCW’s inability to mount any real, effective support to workers, we should be very wary of accepting its leadership. We should be directly involved in workers’ fights for unionization and should be helping to organize those workers into the IWW. UFCW support should be viewed with much caution and more than a little skepticism. When a union repeatedly sells out its membership they don’t want any union.

Turkish unionists jailed

BY OZGUR RADYO

A Turkish court sentenced 18 workers who attended a press conference protesting growing poverty in the country to one and half years in prison Feb. 10. Twenty-three teachers who joined a strike were sentenced to four months in prison, although the sentences of 22 were suspended. They were also banned from teaching for three months.

Some 20,000 people had attended the Labor Platform press conference held in Istanbul’s Beyazit Square on March 31, 2001. Among those sent to prison was Secretary-General Huseyin Ayyildiz of the municipality and local administration workers union.

Teacher Fulya Barut, who participated in a strike in December 2000 to protest government policies, is serving a four-month prison sentence. The court refused to suspend her sentence, saying she had participated in strikes before.

Turkish law makes it illegal for teachers to strike.

Kaiser Aluminum cancels pensions & benefits

Under cover of U.S. bankruptcy law, Maxxam-owned Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corp. recently announced plans to cancel medical and pension benefits for all its employees, union and nonunion, and retirees. The pension benefits are federally insured, but the medical benefits are not.

Maxxam is notorious for clear-cutting old growth redwood forests it bought as part of Pacific Lumber. That company, like Kaiser, was bought with junk bonds. In both cases, Maxxam turned the screws on workers and the environment to make the bond payments.

In 1998, Kaiser locked out its workers for 20 months to force through massive benefits concessions. Shortly after workers settled, Kaiser closed its smelter in order to take advantage of the power crisis to sell its publicly generated electricity supply at a \$468 million profit. Meanwhile, it was looting its pension plan, and is now sticking the government with the tab.

Ergonomics experts boycott conference

Leading ergonomics experts boycotted a two-day OSHA symposium, saying the Bush administration was distorting science for political ends. In a letter to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration 11 leading scientists say the meeting will only rehash questions that have been exhaustively researched. Most ergonomic scientists, unions and workplace-safety advocates agree that some types of work and a variety of musculoskeletal injuries are clearly linked.

"We were invited to participate in a symposium that isn't necessary," said David Wegman, dean of the School of Health at the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Each year, at least 1 million Americans suffer significant work-related injuries, according to a 2001 report by the National Academies of Science. These injuries include wrist and hand problems among computer users and back, knee and shoulder ailments in construction workers, meatpackers and nurses. Shortly after taking office, the Bush administration revoked new regulations intended to reduce these injuries.

Since then, OSHA has focused on encouraging businesses to create safer workplaces rather than on regulation. Few believe these voluntary measures have been effective.

Boss press whines that workers slacking on the job

The Feb. 8 *Denver Post* is one of several U.S. newspapers to whine that we are "slack-ers," based on a Gallup poll in which 71 percent of workers said they are "not engaged" in their work. "The longer employees stay with a company, the more disengaged they become," said Curt Coffman, who surveys a million workers a year for Gallup.

The *Post* quotes one "slacker" who put in "only" 6 1/2 hours a day once it became clear that his job was disappearing. The article does not explain why he worked so hard under the circumstances.

While many workers put in their time without enthusiasm, Coffman complains, 17 percent are "actively disengaged." Some go so far as to follow company policy! The *Post* mentions the shocking case of a woman who made customers aware of a not-so-widely distributed 50 percent discount coupon.

Coffman suggests bosses fire 20 percent of their workers a year, keeping only those who are truly devoted to their employers. But he acknowledges that many managers abuse workers, causing the very low morale and disengagement that he is whining about.

California grocery strike...

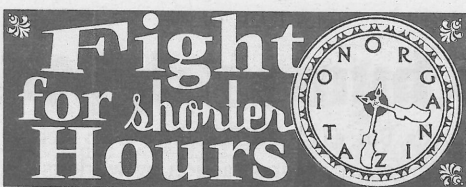
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chains with 2,530 stores in 32 states under names including Kroger, Ralphs, Fred Meyer, Food 4 Less, King Soopers, Smith's, Fry's, Dillons, QFC and City Market. Kroger also operates hundreds of convenience stores, jewelry stores, and food processing plants.

In line with its apparent policy of inflicting as little pressure on the companies as possible, the UFCW extended a separate contract with Kroger's Food 4 Less stores in Southern California two weeks before it was set to expire Feb. 28. On Feb. 2, the UFCW approved new four-year contracts for Kroger workers in Tennessee and Mississippi who had been working without a contract, further undermining the Southern California workers.

Meanwhile, workers are being undermined not only by union scabbing by Teamsters who are once again running warehouses for the chains and delivering truckloads of supplies within a few feet of the picketed loading docks, but also by growing numbers of their own coworkers.

Nearly 10 percent of Safeway workers are back at work, crossing union picket lines, while Kroger-owned Ralphs (which the UFCW is picketing only sporadically) faces a federal investigation for hiring locked-out union workers under false identities. The UFCW has also filed two lawsuits over the



Take Back Time conference

A national conference will be held June 10-13 at Loyola University in Chicago to bring together shorter hours activists to coordinate efforts to put the issue on the public agenda and to build future Take Back Your Time Day celebrations.

Workshops on June 11 will focus on the problem of time poverty and its historical and cultural dimensions, while the next two days will focus on solutions.

Registration and accommodation details can be found at www.timeday.org.

Longer hours for truckers

New regulations allowing employers to require truck drivers to stay on the road for up to 11 straight hours are now in force. Break time between shifts was expanded

from 8 to 10 hours. The Teamsters warn that the new regulations will result in more dangerously fatigued truckers on the road.

Aussie train drivers suspend overtime ban

In Australia, Sydney commuter rail drivers have agreed to suspend an overtime ban for two weeks, but many vowed to donate their overtime "bribe" to charity. The ban had forced cancellation of many trains, as the service does not employ enough drivers to cover its scheduled runs.

"We want to show this is not about money and never has been. All we want is some recognition and to be treated with a little respect," a driver said.

Bosses put on leave for cheating workers of overtime

Three South Africa Metrorail senior managers were put on special leave after the company lost a court case ordering the firm to pay R20 million in unpaid overtime to its workers.

Canada's dirty hands in the war on Iraq

BY X355424, VANCOUVER

Most Canadians grow up with a positive view of our government. We love our Peacekeepers, the UN armed forces, and the fact that a Canadian diplomat invented this particular institution makes us downright patriotic. We're such a noble country that our Prime Minister Chrétien stood up to that lousy fascist in the White House when Bush wanted Canadian troops for the illegal invasion of Iraq.

We're so good. We don't have anything to do with the current war on Iraq. Not us.

That view is probably held by over 95 percent of Canadians, and 100 percent of Americans. Assuming, that is, that you're one of those Americans who's heard of Canada.

That popular picture is totally misleading. Canada is the number 1 foreign maker of arms for the Pentagon. Canada builds 35 major weapons systems for the American troops, and has links with 14 of the top 20 arms making companies around the world. All 14 are U.S. firms.

Every time Canadians cash their pay cheques, a portion goes to the Canada Pension Plan. \$1.8 billion American of that money is "invested" in the stocks of publicly traded U.S. companies that build weapons.

Furthermore, Chrétien wanted to send combat troops into Iraq but a record number of calls and letters promising dire consequences made him do the right thing. That there are Canadian troops helping the Ameri-

cans (but not in actual fighting) is not grasped by most people, Canadian or otherwise.

Sure, Canadians continue to fund peacekeeping operations. But we only devote a small portion of our military budget towards the Peacekeepers. And yes, a Canadian diplomat really *did* develop the first Peacekeepers. But that diplomat, Lester Pearson, went on to become PM while our neighbors were busy invading Vietnam. Guess what? Neither Pearson nor his more famous successor, Pierre Trudeau, did anything to Canadian firms that built weapons to slaughter the Vietnamese. Far from it.

I hope that Canadians will wake up to the fact that our political leaders are just as vile as their U.S. counterparts.

Put simply, all electoral politicians are scum. News flash... not! Someone will drag up FDR, again. Breathe deeply, now boys and girls: the U.S. poverty rate expanded during the FDR presidency. Furthermore, FDR maintained a vicious American foreign policy towards Latin America – invading Nicaragua, for example.

Representative democracy has never expanded human rights. Every expansion has been the result of direct democracy.

There's a pretty simple reason why voting doesn't deliver the goods, and I'm proud to belong to the first organisation to formulate that reason, the Industrial Workers of the World. The reason is that a "wise tailor does not put stitches into rotten cloth."

Which side are they on?

While the UFCW continues to blame the dispute on unfair competition from Wal-Mart, UFCW Vice President Sean Harrigan, who also heads the California Public Employees Retirement System, supports CALPERS' investment of over a billion dollars in Wal-Mart. The UFCW refuses to allow criticism of this on its www.walmartwatch.com site, telling objectors that despite its labor record Wal-Mart is "a pretty good investment." CALPERS also owns \$77 million in Safeway stock.

While making much less than Safeway executives, UFCW officials are not sharing the pain of their members. Rick Icaza, head of UFCW Los Angeles-area Local 770, was paid \$273,404 in 2002, the latest period for which figures are available. The UFCW's Douglas Dority is the best-paid president among the AFL-CIO's 64 unions, at \$329,792. The members whose dues pay for its lavish payroll are generally part-time hourly workers.

Icaza and Orange County local president Greg Conger (who earns about \$200,000), say they and their leadership staffs have taken salary reductions of about 20% since the start of the labor dispute, and may move to 50% cuts shortly. "It's even conceivable that we'll take ourselves off the payroll eventually and work on a volunteer basis," Icaza says.

None of the UFCW locals involved in the dispute pays its president less than \$95,000.

Congress attacks asbestos victims

More than 60,000 workers are expected to die of asbestos-related diseases in the next 15 years. Rather than face up to their responsibility for murdering so many of our fellow workers, the bosses are crying that they need tort reform. And the politicians are listening.

Companies like Halliburton, Owens-Corning and Union Carbide knowingly exposed workers to asbestos, knowing it would take decades for workers to get sick. Now those workers and their survivors are suing the companies to obtain compensation for their injuries, and the companies have turned to the politicians and the bankruptcy laws to shield their assets from wrongful death suits.

The Senate is currently considering the misnamed Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act (S1125), which has already passed the House. The Bill would establish an inadequately funded Asbestos Trust Fund which only a small portion of those exposed to asbestos could collect from. Workers exposed to asbestos off the job would be ineligible for recovery, as would those unable to "conclusively" prove the asbestos was the sole cause of their illness.

Since the purpose of the legislation is to save the companies money, they would be required to pay in only about a fifth of what is needed to cover projected claims, and the Fund would be dissolved altogether after 27 years, even though tens of thousands of workers will be diagnosed with asbestos-related illnesses for many decades to come. Halliburton alone would save \$3.5 billion from existing settlements under the Senate bill, and billions more in future liabilities.

The average claimant would receive only half today's settlement under the legislation, and given the inadequate levels of funding it could take eight years or more before claims are paid out. Most victims would no longer be alive by the time the money to pay their medical bills came through.

Quebec Alcan smelter runs under workers' control

Workers at a Quebec aluminum smelter owned by multinational Alcan Inc. seized control of the plant after management announced closure plans. Productivity at the aluminum plant north of Quebec City has improved since workers took charge in late January, providing Alcan with some \$2.25 million in sales on 1,550 tons of aluminum.

Riot police were on hand for the closure announcement, but were unable to prevent workers from taking control of the plant by remaining at their work stations and ignoring management orders.

"All this was done despite the manoeuvres of deliberate sabotage and non-collaboration by management," said union president Claude Patry. "The unionized workers want to run their factory and the bosses want to block production."

Alcan says it is determined to close the plant, and although the union insists that it's not illegal to continue to work the Quebec Labour Relations Board has ordered workers to surrender control. Workers have voted to defy the order, noting that the closure violates earlier agreements to maintain employment levels and install modern, more efficient equipment.

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Book Review: Workers' rights as human rights

REVIEW BY JON BEKKEN

Workers' Rights as Human Rights, edited by James Gross. Cornell University Press, 2003.

This collection of essays primarily by legal scholars – but also including chapters by an International Labour Organization human rights coordinator, two ministers who have worked with unions, a member of the Bush administration labor department and a full-time shill for the employing class – is the first book-length exploration I am aware of to take seriously the notion that workers have fundamental rights which might be protected under international law.

Several well-documented chapters outline relevant provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the treaties and standards adapted by the International Labour Organization that “guarantee” workers’ rights to form and join unions of their choice, and to engage in activity in defense of their economic and political interests. These rights are not restricted to officially certified or recognized unions – indeed, a strong case can be made that imposing such structures is itself a violation of international law. Rather, it is quite clear that the right to form unions was meant to be inalienable, cover-

ing minorities as well as majorities. And, indeed, in most of the world unions have the right to represent their members, even if those members make up but a small portion of the total workforce.

U.S. labor law, beginning with the Wagner Act and extending to Taft-Hartley and subsequent anti-labor legislation, is fundamentally incompatible with these internationally recognized principles. Gross argues that the Wagner Act, which predates the Universal Declaration, was intended to promote workers’ rights and that its provisions generally conformed to human rights principles. (The legislative history suggests the law instead sought to promote industrial peace by regulating labor relations and isolating more radical labor organizations such as the IWW.)

But since the Taft-Hartley Act was passed, Gross argues, U.S. labor law has drifted ever further out of compliance with international norms. Both in theory and especially in its implementation, most of the authors agree, the U.S. labor law regime violates fundamental human rights and the country’s treaty obligations. On several occasions the International Labor Organization has considered and often upheld complaints brought against the U.S. for violating fundamental labor stan-

dards. But, as in the U.S., there is no mechanism (short of direct action by workers) to enforce these rights, and so the ILO is left to “note with concern” their violation.

James Atleson’s chapter looks to several examples of international labor solidarity actions, which he recognizes as key to making workers’ rights real. Given that governments are unlikely to enforce these rights on their own initiative, and that no international mechanisms exist for their enforcement, he suggests that labor might do better to rely on its own industrial power. While there are laws in place intended to deter such solidarity, the process of corporate globalization nonetheless creates many openings which workers would do well to exploit.

Atleson takes a global approach to his subject, exploring not only U.S. law but also anti-solidarity laws in countries including Canada, Sweden (which does recognize workers’ rights in this regard), and the United Kingdom. In many ways, this is both the most optimistic and the most practical chapter in the book, offering examples of how workers have burst free of their legal fetters to realize their rights through their own direct action.

Other chapters offer stinging indictments (and compelling evidence) of the routine violation of workers’ rights built into U.S. labor law, and chronicle the many ways in which it falls short of internationally accepted human rights principles.

While attempts to enforce international law in the U.S. courts have generally received short shrift (and the U.S. explicitly refuses to abide by the decisions of the World Court), the authors offer arguments and evidence which might help to shift the terms of the debate, were labor to mount a serious campaign to reform U.S. labor law. There are also a growing number of international institutions charged with investigating violations of workers’ human rights – bodies with little enforcement power, but nonetheless which might be helpful as part of a broader campaign targeting particular employers.

Emily Spieler’s chapter argues for reconceptualizing occupational safety and health concerns as human rights, in which workers are entitled to at least a basic level of protection from employers. Arguing that health and safety is a critical – perhaps the critical – element of workplace justice, she notes that while the U.S. does a better job of protecting these rights than many countries, it still falls well short of what a genuine human rights approach would require.

Not surprisingly, the representatives from the employing class and the government argue that U.S. labor law serves us well and that a human rights frame has relevancy only when applied to other countries. These are some of the shortest chapters in the book, and frankly it is difficult to see what purpose they are intended to serve. In a public forum such as this, the authors can not advocate the unfettered dictatorial control that their masters might prefer, and while some academics might find the argument that U.S. labor law protests workers’ rights, no worker ever involved in a union campaign will be deceived by such platitudes.

Despite being written mostly by law professors, the book is generally quite accessible, and its focus on human rights is particularly relevant for those engaged in alternative forms of worker organizing. It also might provide some helpful ideas for those needing to defend workers or unions who have exercised their fundamental rights, and are now facing the legal consequences. But workers intending to rely on international law to uphold their rights will want to organize first, as in the final analysis it is the organized power of the working class and the employing class that will determine whether workers’ rights are respected.

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AFL-CIO is the problem...

continued from page 4

rising at an astronomical rate. Yet the AFL-CIO won’t fight for universal health care and hasn’t even endorsed the long-overdue idea. But if unions won’t help workers in their time of need, how are they going to organize them?

The AFL-CIO is largely invisible. When was the last time you saw a union leader on TV? And can you recall anything that he or she said that was memorable? How can the public know what’s happening in the world of labor, if the AFL won’t sponsor even a weekly TV or radio program or develop an effective public relations department? The simple truth is that we’re not reaching millions of unorganized workers with our message, while the business-controlled media keeps hammering away at what’s wrong with unions. If we can’t talk to non-union workers, how are we going to organize them?

AFL-CIO leaders have lost touch with union members. In 1997, Sweeney and the Executive Council increased their term of office from two years to four years. In 2001, they decreed that conventions would be held every four years instead of every two. They refuse to change a voting system that ensures they will be re-elected again and again, without opposition. And they make no effort to be accountable to union members.

The AFL-CIO’s Web site does not have a forum where members can exchange opinions and experiences. Its official magazine, *America@Work*, does not publish any item that might irritate or embarrass the leadership. Moreover, it reaches only about 2% of the AFL-CIO’s 13 million members. Is that the kind of leadership working people need?

The organizers that are being turned out by the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute’s three-day training program are clearly no match for the professional union-busters that corporations hire. Yet AFL leaders have consistently refused to consider upgrading the Institute’s training program. They keep on contributing large sums to the O.I., while discouraging efforts to evaluate it. If unions are to grow, they’ll need legions of well-trained organizers to take on corporations that are huge and resourceful. Where are these organizers?

There are more than 40 million workers who say they would like to join a union. Why don’t they? There are two main reasons. One is the fear that the boss will fire them. AFL leaders talk a lot about that. The other is that they don’t like what they hear about unions. Well, our leaders avoid that one.

Contrary to the public impression, workers do have a legal right to join a union. They can, if they want to, walk into a union headquarters and sign up. Millions of workers have done so ever since the labor movement was born. AFL-CIO leaders are delighted with the Employee Free Choice Act, introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy in Congress. But no one seriously believes that the AFL-CIO, with its present leadership, can organize the kind of campaign that will make it a reality. If the government won’t protect workers seeking to join unions, then the labor movement must find ways to protect them – if it expects to organize them. If the AFL-CIO will use every available resource to fight for the reinstatement of workers who have been fired for union activity, unorganized workers who want to join a union will get the message.

Organized labor has a proud history of fighting for all workers, not only union members. Through decades of struggle, unions won free public schools, the eight-hour workday, workers compensation, the minimum wage and other protective labor laws. What legacy will our labor movement leave for generations that come after us?

AFL in marketing deal

The AFL-CIO’s Union Privilege program has signed a marketing agreement with scandal-plagued Ullico to peddle insurance products to members of AFL-affiliated unions. Union Privilege is best known for marketing high-interest credit cards to hard-pressed workers and their families.



Tushie has been pretty persistent in sending more hardware up to Mars, spending billions of bucks even while the sidewalks here in Freedomland are the bedrooms for those who have no other place to sleep. But it looks like he is going to find Saddam’s stash of weapons yet, by cracky! After all, he’s having a bit of a credibility problem. His credibility factor is under close scrutiny with all his talk of patriotism. He is a helluva one to spout patriotism as he keeps soldiers off in a far-off land where they are getting picked off one by one, instead of bringing them back home where they might have a chance to be productive workers. What kind patriot gives the go-ahead to the corporations to further pollute our good Freedomland soil and waterways by relaxing environmental standards, wasting billions of dollars as many of his fellow Freedomlanders are sleeping on sidewalks and under bridges.

But look at it positively: at least the homeless don’t have any taxes to pay like the rest of us suckers.

It was one wag of a previous century who quipped that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel. Our poor beleaguered species has more than its share of scoundrels, but I am comforted that they are a small part of our number. We have only to put our heads together a little to devise a way of getting rid of them.

We have been listening to a lot of talk about mad cow, SARS and West Nile, along with the appropriate statistics – which are a drop in the bucket compared to the 30,000 who die each year from the flu, a sad commentary on the lack of medical attention available to the greater part of our population. The worst malady outshines all of these, though. In the past century that we have just endured, wars and related mayhem have accounted for the untimely demise of some 180 million of us. This averages out to 1.8 million per year, or 150,000 per month, or 5,000 per day! We are indeed living under a system where too many decisions are being made by far too few of us. Within the pages of this stalwart little periodical can be found the remedy for this situation.

Mad cow disease can not shine a candle to the depredations caused by the apathetic sheep disease that doesn’t require any overpriced medication, but just a little sneezing the cobwebs off of our collective brains.

According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, both male and female reindeer grow antlers every summer. However, the male reindeer shed their antlers at the onset of winter, while the females hang on to theirs until giving birth the following spring. All the imagery we have been handed shows Santa’s reindeer with prominent antlers – leaving the obvious conclusion that all his reindeer from Rudolph on down to Blitzen were of the gentler sex. Who said women don’t hold up half the world? Who else, despite being pregnant, would be capable of dragging some fat dude in a red suit all over and not lose their way?

Well, here in Freedomland this is the year when the media of mass communication have begun to belch forth the vocal emanations of the male bovine by-product. Election year has befallen us again. Your scribe has lived through a dozen chief executives and concomitant with rising prices, said bovine by-product is thicker than ever. Each new Top Banana somehow makes the previous one look good by comparison. Torrid drawers Willie, who “had nothing to do with that woman,” has since been out prevaricated by Georgie the Tush with his secret hoard of weapons. Who knows what’s next?

Elections? Not any president, prime minister, commissar, pope or what have you is going to solve our problems, for they are only the miserable little pimps for the obscure ones whose survival depends on keeping the rest of us hoodwinked.

The only meaningful vote the majority of us have is the withholding of our efficiency. Stop producing for the parasites and start producing for ourselves. We have a world to gain.

— C.C. Redcloud

BOOKS FOR REBELLIOUS WORKERS

March is Women's History Month



ABC-CLIO's Women in the Workplace

by Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider
A reference text covering women at work from colonial times to present. Entries include the events, organizations, major issues, terms, concepts, and ground-breaking court cases that have changed working conditions for women. The authors also identify notable women and their work and discuss them in brief biographical essays.

An excellent gift for young women who are just entering the world of work.

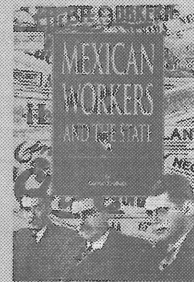
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Mexican Workers and the State: From the Porfiriato to NAFTA by Norman Caulfield
In contemporary Mexico, as during the Porfiriato, the forces of global capitalism are transforming labor, the political system, and other sectors of society. The situation has generated political fragmentation, popular uprisings, violence, militarization and a volatile economy. Within this context, organized labor seeks to redefine itself. Caulfield's book, which contains extensive work on the IWW's cross-border organizing, helps readers understand the importance of independent, internationalist, working class movements.



180 pages, \$15.00

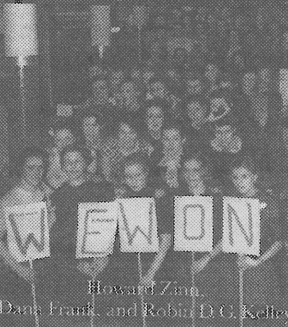
Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World

by Salvatore Salerno
Salerno's book is about one of the most significant traits of the IWW: the union's use of cultural expressions like songs, poems and cartoons to educate and unify workers. Dozens of examples help us understand what mattered to the immigrants, artists, and Wobly intellectuals whose work filled the IWW press.

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THREE STRIKES

Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century



Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century.

by Howard Zinn, Dana Frank & Robin D. G. Kelley.

Zinn recounts the story of the strike that culminated in the Ludlow Massacre; Frank takes us to a sit-down strike in a Detroit Woolworth's during the Great Depression, and Kelley tells of a movie theater musicians strike in New York City as talkies replaced live music. These strikes raise questions about class and how it is defined, about solidarity and its limits, and about the possibilities for struggle when the odds seem insurmountable.

174 pages, hardcover, published at \$23.00, Now \$10.00

DEMOCRACY AT WORK IN AN INDIAN INDUSTRIAL COOPERATIVE

The Story of KERALA DINESH BEEDI

T. M. THOMAS ISAAC
RICHARD W. FRANKE
PYARALAL RAGHAVAN

Democracy at Work in an Indian Industrial Cooperative.

by Thomas Isaac, Richard Franke and Pyaralal Raghavan.
This is the story of Kerala Dinesh Beedi, a democratic workers' cooperative that makes cheap hand-rolled cigarettes known as beedis. The beedi workers have long been among India's most exploited, so the organization in 1969 of this successful cooperative had a transforming effect on the lives of the thousands of workers who work in it, while offering a development model that implicitly challenges mainstream economists' prescriptions. At the same time, the authors do not shy away from the limitations of the cooperative, from the limited opportunities available to women members to the apathy that threatens its democratic culture.

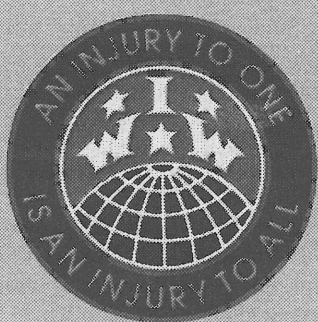
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One Big Union in transport?

continued from page 1

cates of such a strategic alliance between rail workers and workers in the trucking industry claim that the new IBT-BLE&T has the potential to vastly increase the power of workers in the entire transportation industry.

What can engineers expect in terms of "service" from their new parent union? For years, union membership in trucking has been falling. In the face of deregulation, the Teamsters union has been unable or unwilling to organize over-the-road freight. Today, many trucking giants like J.B. Hunt and Fed Ex operate non-union. A few years ago, the IBT half-heartedly engaged in a strike at Overnight, and was crushed. The vast majority of its membership is now employed in other sectors of the economy. In addition, the Teamsters have a long history of conservative politics, mob influence, sweetheart deals with corporations, and a lack of internal union democracy. Engineers would be wise to expect little in the way of service.

What about the idea of a "seamless transportation union"? For years, beginning with the American Railroad Union of the 1890s (the nation's first industrial union), transport workers have realized the pressing need for a cross-craft, and in more recent years, a cross-mode union of all transportation workers. Such a union could provide its membership (and the entire labor movement) with a powerful tool to deal with today's giant carriers. The ability to, in effect, shut down whole regions, or even the entire country, could go a long way toward rebuilding the strength of organized labor. Refusing to scab on each others' strikes, including the refusal to handle freight which has been rerouted from modes under strike, would vastly increase the power of workers in both trucking and rail. Add inland waterways and air freight workers into the mix, and, in theory, you have an invincible combination.

However, we are hardly there right now. For starters, the UTU is very much on the outside, not just of the IBT but of the AFL-CIO. Trainmen, yard masters, switchmen and enginemen of the UTU must somehow be included if such a seamless transport union is to exist. The hostility between these organizations, and the animosity between the crafts of trainman and engineer, must be overcome. In fact, the entire archaic and cumbersome craft union structure on the nation's railroads still remains to be done away with before we can even really talk about building a powerful industrial union in transportation.

Such a union is not merely built by the amalgamation of previously existing craft unions. Unions with long histories of bloated bureaucracies, undemocratic practices, racism and sexism and craft elitism and exclusivity, union scabbing, sweetheart contracts and cozy labor-management relations cannot simply merge and magically create a stronger union. It is up to the rank-and-file of both unions (and that of other rail unions, and other workers in the transport industry, too) to break out of the old craft union structure and build a democratic movement – to demand decent contracts, to make a commitment to organizing, to break with the political machine that has in effect outlawed their right to strike, (to break the law if necessary), and understand that an injury to one is an injury to all.

UTU racketeering charges

UTU international president Byron Boyd and three other top UTU officials have been charged with conspiring to violate federal mail and wire fraud statutes, racketeering, and solicit bribes from attorneys doing business with the union. Two of the four have pled guilty; Boyd and a top aide are scheduled to go to trial March 22, 2004.

Former UTU President Charles Little has acknowledged that he and Boyd collected tens of thousands of dollars in cash from attorneys seeking to become appointed by the union as designated legal council to handle workers compensation claims.

General strike rocks Dominican Republic

BY PABLO SANCHEZ

Eight people were killed and hundreds arrested January 29 and 30 during a massive two-day general strike as workers protested the peso's sharp devaluation, soaring inflation and persistent power outages.

President Mejia warned on the eve of the strike that it "comes at an inopportune moment, is harmful to business and dangerous to social order, and contributes nothing to solving the economic problems that plague us." Of course for these bourgeois politicians it is never the time to fight for rights and a decent standard of living.

The electricity sector has become more decrepit, and the peso's depreciation pushed inflation up to 42.5 percent last year. Unemployment has reached an estimated 17 percent. These are just the official figures. Gas prices were increased by 18 percent a week before the strike. This is making life almost a luxury for Dominican.

The cause of the general strike is the deal the Dominican government reached with the IMF. The general strike was called by the Coordination of Unity and Struggle (CUL), the Collective of Popular Organisations and the Broad Front of Popular Struggle (FALPO).

Iranian strikers killed

Riot police killed at least four workers and injured dozens more Jan. 24 during a strike in southeastern Iran. Some reports say as many as 15 workers may have been killed.

The workers were employed in the construction of the Nazkhaton's Copper Smelting plant in the village of Khatoonabad. Their employer had promised permanent contracts to the 1,500 workers, but only kept 250 workers on once construction was completed. The workers therefore went on strike and occupied the plant.

Eight days into the strike local authorities brought in special police forces in helicopters in order to evict the strikers from the plant. The confrontation then spread to the nearby city of Shahr-e Babak.

After the confrontation, residents gathered in front of the dead workers' homes, demanding that those responsible for their deaths be held to account. Protests and clashes with police reportedly continued over the following days, leading to the arrest of more than 80 workers and their relatives.

Chinese labor protests

BY CHINA LABOUR BULLETIN

Nearly 2,000 workers are staging protests in an ongoing struggle to recover unpaid benefits from the bankrupt Tieshu Textile Factory in Suizhou, Hubei Province.

Some 1,200 workers blocked the local railway Feb. 8 for several hours before they were attacked by 800 armed police. Scores of workers were injured in the attack, and more than 20 workers were arrested in the days following the protest.

Hundreds of workers continue to gather each day outside government offices, demanding that money they were pressured to pay into the bankrupt company be repaid. Management told investors that the firm was headed into bankruptcy at the same time that workers were being pressured to buy shares.

European Economic Summit

On the eve of Poland's accession to the European Union (scheduled for May 1), the European Economic Summit (which was cancelled in Dublin due to planned protests) is coming to Warsaw April 28-30. Polish anarchists and other activists are organizing an Alternative Summit to include demonstrations, discussions, direct actions, etc., including a major demonstration April 29.

The main focus of the Alternative Summit will be on a critique of current economic trends and practices and proposing radical alternatives to them. Those interested in presenting or more info should contact the organizers at: szymon666@poczta.onet.pl



Bangladeshi garment workers map strategy

A two-day conference of garment workers from the Dhaka, Chiatagong, Mongla and Nilfamari export processing zones ended Jan. 31 with a declaration demanding that unions be allowed to organize in the zones and that recent pay cuts be reversed.

National Garments Workers Federation secretary Amirul Haque Amin chaired the meeting, which was joined by several other Bangladeshi garment unions. A 21-member steering committee was formed to coordinate efforts in the zones

Iraqi unions protest falling wages

The Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq issued the following appeal (edited for length and clarity) while organizing a series of protests for Feb. 15:

The harsh living conditions and low wages have driven labor to face many hardships, depriving them not only of the ability to achieve a decent life, but also of the means to achieve a minimum standard necessary to keep them alive in the current situation.

When job classifications were implemented, it disregarded the hardship that labor is going through. It also disregarded the hazards workers are exposed to in their workplaces, and created a huge gap between senior workers and the largest section of workers that reached a differential of up to 30 times. It caused vast social differences among human beings as well as great deprivation for

the largest sector of society.

Workers are fully dependent on their salary. It is their only source of income. Any damage to this income by the authorities will cause severe poverty and deprivation.

Thousands of workers are striking daily against the current salary classification, and demanding revisions that take the current living standard into consideration.

In order not to dissipate workers' efforts in scattered and ineffective strikes, and in order to increase their income to a fair and acceptable level, the workers must intervene and raise their demands and reach out their voices for their best interests.

There is no class but the working class that is capable of fighting back for their own rights. Workers alone can prevent any other will from being imposed on their own will.

Sweeney calls for worker rights in Iraq

BY HARRY KELBER

AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney reaffirmed "the need for a multilateral approach for the reconstruction of Iraq and its transition to democratic rule" after a meeting with U.N. General Secretary Kofi Annan on Jan. 22, attended by leaders of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

"The rebuilding of Iraq and the introduction of democratic self-rule will only succeed if the Iraqi people themselves have a major role and responsibility in the reconstruction process rather than being alienated from it," Sweeney said in a little-circulated statement.

This is the first time that the AFL-CIO has made any public comment about events in Iraq since the U.S. invasion in March 2003.

Sweeney decried the fact that the labor laws imposed by Saddam Hussein in 1987, which deny workers the right to create and join unions of their own choosing, were still in effect. He called for drafting a new labor code consistent with ILO international labor standards.

The AFL-CIO president noted that the overwhelming majority of Iraqis are unemployed and "they fear that their economic well-being is out of their control and in the hands of outsiders."

Leaders of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions have been complaining about the intimidating attitude of the Coalition Political Authority toward Iraqi workers, who are attempting to organize into unions. On Dec. 6, a contingent of U.S. soldiers arrested eight IFTU leaders, handcuffed them and took them away to an unknown destination.

The attackers ransacked IFTU property, tearing down banners and posters, using black paint to deface the entry to union headquarters and smashing windows, without giving any reason for their actions.

Despite the climate of repression and limited resources, IFTU has been organizing workers in the oil and gas, railway, food, textile and other basic Iraqi industries. They are conducting a major campaign for reconstruction jobs in a shattered economy where about seven million people are unemployed. (The Coalition recently announced it was recognizing the IFTU as the sole legitimate union

center in the country, apparently in a bid to prevent more radical unions from taking root.)

Sweeney's comments on Iraq appear only as a press statement on the AFL-CIO Web site. There is no mention of it in its news reports or anywhere else.

But having broken its silence on Iraq, will the AFL-CIO now start to keep its members informed about what's happening to working people in that country? We'll be watching – and hoping that the answer is Yes.

Colombia delegation hits "Killer Coke"

City Council Member Hiram Monserrate and other members of a New York City fact-finding delegation released a report Jan. 29 on their recent trip to Colombia, where they spent 10 days interviewing Coca-Cola workers and meeting with executives, politicians, activists and clergy.

"Union activists [are] being persecuted, tortured and even killed for exercising internationally recognized human rights," said Dorothee Benz, director of communications for CWA Local 1180. "The correlation between Coke's profitability in Colombia and the human rights abuses suffered by its worker is deeply, deeply disturbing."

The delegation called for retaliatory criminal charges against Coke employees to be withdrawn and a public statement from Coca-Cola supporting international labor rights and denouncing anti-union violence.

"The lives of students, workers, women, and everyone struggling for justice in Colombia is a life lived with daily terror," said Lenore Palladino, national organizer for United Students Against Sweatshops. "The incredible fear witnessed in Colombia is reason enough to require that Coca-Cola ensure students and residents in the U.S. that buy their products that they are doing everything they can to protect their Colombian workers from violence and murder."

Coca-Cola officials denied complicity in such violence, but acknowledged that persons employed by the company may have worked with paramilitaries. The company claimed the criminal charges were a "consequence" of employees' charges against the company in

2.6 million child workers

BY KESHAB POUDEL

To highlight the plight of over 2.6 million Nepalese children trapped in hazardous and exploitative jobs, child workers plan to send palm prints of more than 1,000 children to the World Congress on Child Labor to be held in Florence, Italy, this May.

According to the ILO, child workers comprise 40 percent of Nepal's child population, typically working 14 hours or more per day. While those who migrate to urban areas are forced to work as domestic servants, porters, rag pickers and bonded laborers in carpet factories, children in rural areas face agricultural labor and the ongoing war with Maoist rebels. Thousands of girls are recruited into sex work in Nepal and neighboring India, while many boys work hazardous jobs in quarrying.

A 1996 ILO study revealed that 41.7 percent of all children aged between five and 14 work regularly. Nepalese laws make the employment of children below the age of 14 an offence, but the law is rarely enforced.

Global Labour Survey

BY ERIC LEE, LABOURSTART

Every year, the World Economic Forum produces a "Global Competitiveness Report." They ask the World Bank and corporate executives around the world about economic conditions. But they don't ask us – people who know the labour scene – about how workers and unions fare around the world.

Our friends at Harvard University's Labor and Worklife Program thought it would be a good idea to conduct a survey of our own. They're calling it the Global Labour Survey. If we can get a large number of you to take the time to fill out this online survey, we can present an alternative view to the one the WEF is presenting. The survey (available in English, French and Spanish) is located at: <http://gls.law.harvard.edu/>

Politics kills general strike

A general strike set for Feb. 24 to protest a Supreme Court ruling barring strikes by government workers collapsed after the Indian National Trade Union Congress withdrew from participation. All major Indian unions are linked to political parties, which traditionally use union struggles to advance their party agendas.



U.S. court for its alleged campaign of terror and murder towards its unionized workforce.

In Colombia, workers are killed, threatened, tortured or "disappeared" on a daily basis. In the last 17 years, nearly 4,000 union members have been murdered – most by right-wing paramilitary forces.

The Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Industrias Alimenticias represents Colombia's Coca-Cola employees. Fourteen of their members have been 14 assassinated (7 from Coca-Cola – one inside the walls of the plant), and many more have received death threats and kidnappings, been fired or jailed for union activity. The union sued Coca-Cola in July 2001; Coke responded with the criminal charges in Colombia.

In November thousands of signed "Unthinkable! Undrinkable!" petitions were delivered to Coke's headquarters. In December UAW Local 22 voted to get rid of the Coke machine in its union hall – and is asking management to do the same in the plant – after a presentation from Ray Rogers. For information and updates on the campaign, visit www.killercoke.org